

**Redefining Didactic Traditions: Mary Wollstonecraft and Feminist  
Discourses of Appropriation, 1749-1847**

by

**Kirstin Collins Hanley**

B.A. in English, The Pennsylvania State University, 2001

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This dissertation was presented

by

Kirstin Collins Hanley

It was defended on

May 24, 2007

and approved by

Jean Ferguson Carr, Associate Professor, Department of English

Don Bialostosky, Professor, Department of English

Amanda J. Godley, Assistant Professor, Department of Instruction and  
Learning

Dissertation Director: Stephen L. Carr, Associate Professor,  
Department of English

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This project examines the relationship between mid 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> century feminism and didacticism through the work of one of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century's most celebrated feminist writers, Mary Wollstonecraft. It is my contention that Wollstonecraft's work is representative of the ways in which women writers of this period manipulated didactic conventions and strategies to further feminist goals. Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, often recognized as feminism's "manifesto," is generally regarded as the text that defines and delimits the scope of Wollstonecraft's feminist project. Yet Wollstonecraft's didactic texts, although generally dismissed in feminist critical contexts, further define and elaborate on her feminist project by promoting resistance to 18<sup>th</sup> century discourses concerning women's 'proper sphere.' Reading Wollstonecraft's work in relation to 18<sup>th</sup> century didactic traditions, I argue that Wollstonecraft appropriates and revises the work of 18<sup>th</sup> century writers on the subject of women's education such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Dr. John Gregory, epitomizing a feminist didactic approach later (re)deployed by Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë.

In the first chapter, I (re)read Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of authoritative discourse, generating a theoretical framework for understanding Wollstonecraft's feminist discourse as appropriation. I suggest that *Vindication* enacts the same discursive strategies as Wollstonecraft's didactic texts in its appropriation of established 18<sup>th</sup> century masculine discourses. In Chapters II and III, I situate Wollstonecraft's didactic texts, *The Female Reader*, *Original Stories*, and *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, in relation to didactic texts and traditions that shaped them, arguing that Wollstonecraft appropriates these texts and traditions in order to establish a feminist pedagogical approach. Chapters IV and V examine the continuities between Wollstonecraft's didactic approach and the work of Austen and Brontë. They, like Wollstonecraft, borrow from and appropriate earlier didactic texts and traditions in order to construct their feminist projects. The very different ways in which Austen and Brontë (re)work these traditions, I suggest, reveals a shift in feminist thought from the late 18<sup>th</sup> through the mid 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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## PREFACE: (RE)READING DIDACTICISM

In the following pages I have endeavored to point out some important things with respect to female education. It is true, many treatises have been already written; yet it occurred to me, that much still remained to be said.

—Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*

I had been toiling for nearly an hour with Miss Lister, Miss Marriott and Ellen Cook, striving to teach them the distinction between an article and a substantive...In the afternoon; Miss Ellen Lister was trigonometrically oecumenical about her French lessons...If those girls knew how I loathe their company, they would not seek mine as they do.

—Charlotte Brontë, *Roe Head Journal*

—Oh! Dear Fanny, Your mistake has been one that thousands of women fall into...There are such beings in the World perhaps, one in a Thousand, as the Creature You & I should think perfection...but such a person may not come in your way, or if he does, he may not be the eldest son of a Man of Fortune, the Brother of your particular friend, & belonging to your own Country.—Think of all this Fanny.

—Jane Austen, *Letters*

In 1983, Jan Fergus remarked on what she saw as the modernist turn from didacticism as a way of understanding and interpreting literary structure and conventions, as she suggests "the classical dictum, still operative in eighteenth- and early nineteenth- century fiction, that literature should delight and instruct, has since been largely abandoned or qualified beyond recognition, and few words used in criticism carry more negative

connotations than 'didactic'" (10). Feminist critical approaches to the work of Mary Wollstonecraft provide a powerful example of this larger turn away from didacticism. Critics of the seventies inscribed Wollstonecraft into a scholarly context and ultimately into the literary canon, and critical discussions of Wollstonecraft often focus on the polemic treatise *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) as feminism's "manifesto" (Brody 25). However, prior to the publication of this controversial text in 1792, Wollstonecraft made a rather meager living as a schoolmistress and as a writer of didactic texts. Most critics have dismissed these texts in an attempt to resolve what they see as an ideological contradiction between the seemingly conservative pedagogy these texts promote and the powerful reforms proposed in *Vindication*.

Prominent Wollstonecraft critics Janet Todd and Moira Ferguson offer a few plausible, yet dismissive explanations as to why Wollstonecraft's earlier didactic and later polemic works appear to have contradictory interests regarding the improvement of women. In the Introduction to *The Female Reader*, Ferguson argues that the disparity between Wollstonecraft's later desire to transform the 18<sup>th</sup> century woman through a "revolution in female manners" (229) and the seemingly conservative pedagogy of her didactic writings may be attributed to an early lack of a "radical" influence that affected her only in her later years, when she became associated with "[persons who were] relativist-inclined-atheists, empiricists, and free thinkers rather than

idealistic traditionalists [who] provided support and an intellectual touchstone for the change in her thinking" (xvii). In addition, Ferguson views the ideological contradictions between the earlier and latter stages of Wollstonecraft's writing, as well as the obvious differences between what Wollstonecraft advocates pedagogically and her life itself, as an oversight, or the result of a lapse in discernment, as she states: "the contrast between this message [women as "dutiful wives and mothers"] and the lives and situations of the female contributors to the anthology [of *The Female Reader*] escapes Wollstonecraft" [italics mine] (xxi). Finally, both Ferguson and Todd suggest that Wollstonecraft's didactic works were products of her penury, and that she was simply "catering to a known market" (Ferguson xxvi), or hesitant to write outside of an acceptable mode of feminine discourse early in her career.

The dismissal of Wollstonecraft's didactic writing speaks to a larger feminist tendency to ignore the relationship between late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> century feminism and didactic traditions. Didactic texts have gained a reputation in both feminist criticism as well as history of the book as repositories of authoritative masculine discourse that relegated women to the domestic sphere.<sup>1</sup> For the most part, these texts did function to

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<sup>1</sup> This argument is elaborated (in various ways) in Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987), Nan Johnson's *Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric in North America*. (1991), Cathy Davidson's *Revolution and the Word* (1986), Kate Flint's *The Woman Reader* (1993), and Harvey Graff's *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society* (1987).

inscribe particular notions of womanhood and what constituted appropriate feminine behavior; however, in overlooking these texts, we dismiss a large body of writing that functioned to shape literary culture in the romantic period and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. William St. Clair's recent study in the history of the book entitled *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (2004) calls attention to the prolific circulation of didactic writing throughout the late 18<sup>th</sup> and much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that "constitute[s] a body of texts which, if we are to be fair to the mentalities of the romantic period, deserve our attention" (St. Clair 276). Extending St. Clair's study to address the specific relationship between didactic traditions and Wollstonecraft's work, I will argue that her work was shaped by and, in turn, revised and appropriated these traditions, and in turn again affected the work of other women writers.

In (re)reading and (re)thinking the work of Wollstonecraft through the lens of book history, I seek to call the opposition between feminism and didacticism into question—to complicate the feminist critical notion that texts by late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> century women writers were *either* 'feminist' or 'didactic.' In Chapters I-III, I will argue that Wollstonecraft deploys the same revisionary strategies in her didactic texts as she does in *Vindication*, appropriating authoritative masculine discourse to further establish *the rights of woman*. In Chapters IV and V, I will address the work of Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë—two canonical women writers often identified as "feminists"—to argue

that they, like Wollstonecraft, borrow from and appropriate didactic traditions in order to establish feminist projects.

### **Late 18<sup>th</sup> /Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Didactic Traditions**

When I refer to "didactic texts" in general, I characterize a large body of writing that circulated widely during the late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries that incorporated didactic themes/strategies in order instruct readers often in conjunction with paratextual features such as prefaces, exercises, and other didactic apparatuses. As William St. Clair argues, didactic texts overwhelmed the book market in Britain during the romantic period, as writers attempted to reinforce the "mainstream ideology" in response to growing threats of political and social change (277). Many of these texts, ranging from social and domestic guides (often referred to in criticism as 'advice manuals' or 'conduct books') to textbooks devoted to literacy and other types of school instruction such as the elocutionary reader, were geared towards young women. The term "didactic" also applies to many late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> century novels, which, as Jane Spencer argues, were more like "dramatized conduct book[s] for young women" (142), advocating proper moral behavior as a necessary part of women's duty. The time frame of my study reflects the rise and decline of influential didactic traditions, beginning in 1749 with the publication of Sarah Fielding's *The Governess*, often recognized as the first didactic novel geared specifically towards young women. The date of 1847 marks the

publication of *Jane Eyre* and what I recognize as a critical turn away from the pedagogy Wollstonecraft and Fielding promote.

Carr, Carr, and Schultz's approach to 19<sup>th</sup> century textbooks in *Archives of Instruction* (2005) provides a useful model for understanding the complex relationships amongst didactic texts. Their recognition of 19<sup>th</sup> century textbooks in the U.S. as belonging to "traditions" rather than 'types' or 'genres' emphasizes the ways in which textbooks often borrow from and "rework" one another, as Carr, Carr, and Schultz "trace the intermittent migrations of routines, practices, and principles from one tradition to another" (17). I adopt the term "tradition" to signify the dynamic and fluid nature of didactic discourses disallowed by the term 'genre,' which reflects my larger project of recognizing how didactic texts are appropriated and revised in Wollstonecraft's work. Throughout this study, I invoke common critical terms for specific didactic traditions such as "conduct book" and "elocutionary reader" and provide designations for traditions that have been hitherto unrecognized. In each case, I explain the conventional aspects of a didactic tradition based on widely-circulating exemplars that might be read as representative of what Carr, Carr, and Shultz refer to as the "shared features" of a tradition (16). In so doing, I essay to distinguish frequently elided textual traditions from one another.

## **Feminism and the Discourse of Appropriation**

In most feminist critical contexts that address Wollstonecraft and other women writers of the late 18th/early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, feminism is recognized as an ideological position or attitude that might be characterized according to categories espoused by postmodern feminism. Anne K. Mellor's attempt to link Jane Austen's work to Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* exemplifies the common approach of characterizing late 18<sup>th</sup> century feminism using the terms and categories that have evolved out of first/second wave and (post)modern feminisms. She suggests that "it is crucial to see that Austen is neither the eighteenth-century conservative so many critics have long described, nor the radical feminist Margaret Kirkham and others have recently claimed" (52). She goes on to describe Austen as a "moderate feminist." This approach is inherently limited, as it seeks to apply terms that have evolved within a particular political movement to the work of women writers who had no such forum to establish a consolidated feminist agenda.

In opposition to this common characterization, I will treat "feminism" as any discursive practice that seeks to subvert authoritative masculine discourse through appropriation. Understood in this way, a "feminist" approach is not necessarily an explicit or overt one; it might be recognized in the subtle redefinition of a term such as "virtue" or the revision of a didactic project. I have utilized Bakhtin's theory of authoritative discourse which characterizes the struggle involved



in assimilating "the word of the fathers" as a model for understanding the ways in which women writers appropriated established masculine discourses prior to the advent of feminist political movements. In general, I invoke the term "appropriation" in the Bakhtinian sense—as the "assimilation" of another's discourse that is "tightly interwoven with 'one's own word'" ("Novel" 345). However, as didactic texts are comprised of paratextual features that mark them as belonging to certain traditions, I also use "appropriation" to signify Wollstonecraft's recasting of an earlier didactic structure or framework. At times, I qualify "appropriation" with a term that more accurately characterizes the process in relation to a specific didactic text. For example, in Chapter III, I use the term "refashioning" which I borrow from Carr, Carr, and Schultz to signify a method of adaptation specific to didactic traditions.

This project does not work towards a recovery of didactic writing for its own sake, however. Rather, the following chapters underscore the ways in which women writers manipulated didactic traditions as a means of generating feminist projects. Showing how feminism and didacticism intersect opens up ways of thinking about the possibilities and limitations of late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> century feminist practices and, in turn, how we might make use of those practices today.

## 1.0 (RE)READING A *VINDICATION*: FEMINIST DISCOURSE AS APPROPRIATION

Often recognized as feminism's "manifesto," Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* has consistently been characterized as representative of feminist positions that reflect the values of very diverse political and academic agendas. Carol H. Poston describes Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* as a text that endures because it is often subsumed by the interests of whatever feminist movement it appeals to, as she explains that "the history of the subsequent editions of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* closely parallels the vicissitudes of the women's movement: when feminism as a political cause comes to the fore ... Mary Wollstonecraft's work is one of the first to be reissued" (ix). Advocates of the early women's rights movement recognized in Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* a powerful manifesto to reinforce the ideology of republican motherhood, and Wollstonecraft was established as an important figure in late 19<sup>th</sup> century feminist culture. Proponents of the early feminist movement focused on Wollstonecraft's arguments concerning the improvement of women's "moral responsibility" within the domestic sphere and overlooked those that called for more radical forms of political and "social change" (Brody 59). Critics of the seventies hoped to re-inscribe the 'domesticated' Wollstonecraft of the early feminists into the

politically radical context of the French Revolution, and were writing about authors like Wollstonecraft as a way to shape the emergent field of "women's studies" (Sapiro 316-318).<sup>2</sup> These readings are representative of positions critics frequently ascribe to when addressing Wollstonecraft in current critical contexts—she is either a 'moderate' feminist who hopes to ameliorate women through education or a 'radical' feminist who recognizes the condition of women as indicative of the need for more profound political or social change.<sup>3</sup>

While *Vindication* has been lionized for its feminist approach and established as part of the feminist literary canon, Wollstonecraft's didactic texts have often been dismissed as reinforcing normative 18<sup>th</sup> century educational standards for women. Usually, this distinction is made based on genre; critics recognize *Vindication* as a polemic that enables Wollstonecraft to voice her perspective regarding the improvement of women and establish a more 'radical' position than other women writers addressing similar issues in more 'conservative' didactic modes

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<sup>2</sup> For an elaboration of these feminist arguments, see Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joselyn Gage's *History of Woman Suffrage* (New York: Fowler & Wells, 1881), Elizabeth Robins Pennel's *Mary Wollstonecraft* (1885) and "A Century of Women's Rights," (Fortnightly Review, 1890), Millicent Garrett Fawcett's "A Pioneer of the Movement" (from *The Case for Women's Suffrage*, 1907), Virginia Sapiro's "Feminist Studies and the Discipline: A Study of Mary Wollstonecraft," (1974), and Elissa S. Guralnick's "Radical Politics in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*" (1977). Excerpts from Pennel, Fawcett, and articles by Sapiro and Guralnick reprinted in Harriet Devine Jump's *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Critics, 1788-2001*, Vol. I. (New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Alison Sulloway's characterization of Wollstonecraft in *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood* (U of Pennsylvania, 1989) vs. Mellor's characterization in *Romanticism and Gender* (Routledge, 1993).

(Ferguson and Todd 320). However, Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* and her didactic texts are actually very similar in their discursive approach to masculine authoritative discourses. In both *Vindication* and her didactic texts, Wollstonecraft's feminism is simultaneously a reinscription of authoritative discourses and an appropriation of them. Therefore, her feminist 'position'—which earlier critics have attempted to establish and categorize—is contingent upon the mode of masculine discourse to which she "responds" at a given point in the text, and is thus often described as fragmented and circuitous.<sup>4</sup> Here, I will discuss Wollstonecraft's approach to appropriating masculine authoritative discourses in *Vindication* as a theoretical model for characterizing the discursive practices of her didactic texts in subsequent chapters.

Mitzi Myers remarks on the manner in which women of the late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19th centuries simultaneously adopted and resisted established masculine discourses to assure their arguments a "proper hearing:"

Subordinate groups like women must shape their world  
views through the dominant models, transforming their

---

<sup>4</sup> Both Janet Todd and Miriam Brody have remarked on *Vindication's* multitude of "digressions, contradictions, and asides" (what Brody refers to as Wollstonecraft's "concentric" writing style), as Wollstonecraft will seemingly drop one subject and move on to another abruptly, or without explanation (Todd 186). Strangely enough, this tendency towards "digression," Todd argues, is that which has enabled Wollstonecraft to "anticipate[] most positions of modern feminism" (186), or to "speak[] as much to the problems of women at the turn of the twenty-first century as it did to those of the contemporaries of Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792" (Brody 2).

own perceptions and needs as best they can in terms of received frameworks. If women's alternative or counterpart models are not acceptably encoded in the prevailing male idiom, female concerns will not receive proper hearing...Since female models characteristically operate in terms of strategically redefining and rescripting traditional markers, the linguistic surface of such sexual pronouncements must be carefully scrutinized for imperfect integrations, submerged conflicts, covert messages—for all the meanings which hover interstitially. (quoted in Poston 332)

Myers calls attention to the possibility of women writers "strategically redefining and rescripting traditional markers," but she does not elaborate on how to read "women's alternate or counterpart models," suggesting that we must "scrutinize[] [them] for imperfect integrations, submerged conflicts, covert messages—for all the meanings which hover interstitially." While Myers does enact a reading of both Wollstonecraft and Hannah Moore in which she demonstrates how various discourses might be recognized as part of a larger historical debate concerning women's role in 18<sup>th</sup> century society, she lacks a theoretical approach by which to identify "imperfect integrations, submerged conflicts, covert

messages.”<sup>5</sup> Like Myers, feminist critics such as Mary Poovey and Laurie Finke acknowledge and have sought to analyze the various discursive manifestations of Wollstonecraft’s struggle with masculine discourses, yet none offers insight into the process by which Wollstonecraft enacts the “redefining or rescripting traditional markers.”<sup>6</sup> A woman writing on the improvement of women in the late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries inevitably entered a conversation dominated by men of letters that obliged her to contend—not just with an 18<sup>th</sup> century “male-dominated philosophic discourse” (Finke 20) in general, but with the discrete and nuanced discourses established by philosophers, political theorists, didactic writers, among others on the subject of women’s role in society. In “The Problem of Speech Genres,” Bakhtin describes the “complex and multiplanar” nature of the “work-utterance” (93, 75-76), a theoretical approach that allows us to read *Vindication*—not as a set of “covert messages”—but as

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<sup>5</sup> Myers’s approach (suggesting that critics “scrutiniz[e]” the text for “imperfect integrations, [etc.]”) could become somewhat challenging in relation to a text like *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which is comprised of a variety of “received frameworks.” Although many of the “dominant models” Wollstonecraft adopts in *Vindication* are within the realm of common critical knowledge (and appear as footnotes in the annotated versions of the text), such as the Bible, Milton, Pope, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Paine, among many others, when looking at Wollstonecraft’s earlier works (and the fact that she worked as a critic for the *Analytical Review*) it is evident that her influences extended beyond these larger literary and political figures to include writers on education such as Catharine Macaulay (*Letters on Education* (1790)) Hester Chapone (*Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773)), and Sarah Trimmer (*Fabulous Histories* (1784)).

<sup>6</sup> See Mary Poovey’s “The Gender of Genres in Late Eighteenth-Century England” and Laurie Finke’s “‘A Philosophic Wanton’: Language and Authority in Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*,” in Harriet Devine Jump’s *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Critics 1788-2001* (Routledge, 2003).

"a link in the chain of speech communication ... with respect to other, related utterances" (93):

However monological the utterance may be (for example, a scientific or philosophical treatise), however much it may concentrate on its own object, it cannot but be, in some measure, a response to what has already been said about the given topic, on the given issue, even though this responsiveness may not have assumed a clear-cut external expression. It will be manifested in the overtones of the style, in the finest nuances of the composition. (92)<sup>7</sup>

As Bakhtin's conception of the "work-utterance" suggests, we cannot "understand fully the style" of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* without first considering the diversity of its "dialogic overtones"—without imagining how the construction of Wollstonecraft's feminist discourse serves as a "response to what has already been said on the given topic" of women's education (92). By locating the "others' thoughts" to which *Vindication* "responds," I would argue that we might identify the points at which Wollstonecraft appropriates authoritative discourse to establish the rights of woman. Utilizing Bakhtin's theory concerning "authoritative discourse," we might also identify this

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<sup>7</sup> In a Bakhtinian sense, the definition of "style" takes on a specific role in relation to his argument concerning the nature of the "utterance" (see above), and it is considered a direct result of "how the speaker (or writer) senses and imagines his addressees" (95), which determines "my choice of a genre for my utterance, my choice of compositional devices, and, finally, my choice of language vehicles, that is, the *style* of my utterance" (96).

type of discourse's discursive effects, thus rendering the "meanings which hover interstitially" recognizable as well. Bakhtin suggests that when a discourse is actualized and reified from positions of power (like masculine discourse in the 18<sup>th</sup> century), it

...demands our unconditional allegiance...[and] permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylizing variants on it. It enters our verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it. It is indissolubly fused with its authority—with political power, an institution, a person—and it stands and falls together with that authority. One cannot divide it up—agree with one part, accept but not completely another part, reject utterly a third part...Authoritative discourse cannot be represented—it is only transmitted. (343-44)

A discourse that "cannot be represented" but "only transmitted" leaves little latitude for argumentative "play," as one must "totally affirm" or "totally reject" the discourse as it cannot be modified; one cannot nuance the discourse, or as Bakhtin suggests, "stylize" or "vary" it, which is the 'grey area' in which most successful arguments develop. Laurie Finke's description of the position of the writing subject in the polemic genre demonstrates that it was a likely forum for the total



affirmation or total rejection of authoritative discourse, as she suggests (quoting Walter Ong) that argument during the 18<sup>th</sup> century was considered a form of "combat" in which one engaged in either "defense" or "attack" of a particular polemic "position" (Jump 5). She further explains that, "As a woman, Wollstonecraft could not hope to be published without appropriating...this rhetorical prose, however incongruous it might seem for her sex" (Jump 5).

However, Bakhtin's theory concerning authoritative discourse allows for a discursive possibility that extends beyond the dichotomies of total affirmation/total rejection or (using Finke's terms) defense/attack. Bakhtin's theory suggests that, when it is acknowledged as such, authoritative discourse "is only transmitted." But the "dialogic interrelationship" existing between authoritative discourse and its counterpart, "internally persuasive discourse" reveals that "another's discourse" can be "simultaneously authoritative and internally persuasive"—a "struggle" between the "authoritative word" on the one hand, and the "internally persuasive" word which "is denied all privilege, backed up by no authority at all, and is frequently not even acknowledged in society..." (Bakhtin 342). Unlike "authoritative discourse," "internally persuasive discourse" is "affirmed through assimilation, tightly interwoven with 'one's own word.' In the everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that

such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition" (Bakhtin 345).

Given the "dialogic interrelationship" between these two types of discourse, we might read *Vindication* as appropriating aspects of the masculine authoritative discourses that Wollstonecraft found to be internally persuasive, while totally accepting or totally rejecting those that remained merely authoritative to her. What Myers, Poovey, and Finke treat as Wollstonecraft's acquiescence to authoritative discourse, I see as a dialogue taking place between the authoritative and the internally persuasive word that ultimately represents "an intense struggle within...for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values" (Bakhtin 346). We cannot, of course, know the nature of Wollstonecraft's "struggle within" as she wrote *Vindication* or what attitudes she had towards specific types of discourses. However, Bakhtin's description of the discursive effects of authoritative and internally persuasive discourses (i.e. transmission vs. assimilation) makes it possible to discern the features of such discourse in Wollstonecraft's text.

The most pervasive and profound example of Wollstonecraft's appropriation of authoritative discourse involves her manipulation of Scripture. With more than thirty references to Biblical passages (not counting those invoked through Milton's *Paradise Lost*), Wollstonecraft demonstrates that the Bible might

be appropriated in service of—rather than to undermine—an argument for the improvement of women.<sup>8</sup> Dismissing the conventional monitory verses reinforcing women's subjugation to man (i.e., Eve as Adam's rib, man as the 'head' of the household), Wollstonecraft recognizes the "omnipotence" of a New Testament God, or "the supreme Being," who is "just," "wise," and "good"—a God who aligns with what her "reason tells [her]" divinity should be (46). For instance, in Chapter II of *Vindication* entitled "The Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character Discussed," Wollstonecraft writes

Probably the prevailing opinion, that woman was created for man, may have taken its rise from Moses's poetical story; yet, as very few, it is presumed, who have bestowed any serious thought on the subject, ever supposed that Eve was, literally speaking, one of Adam's ribs, the deduction must be allowed to fall to the ground; or, only be so far admitted as it proves that man, from the remotest antiquity, found it convenient to exert his strength to subjugate his companion, and his invention to shew that she ought to have her neck bent under the yoke, because the whole

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<sup>8</sup>Wollstonecraft's appropriation of Scripture in the interests of feminist goals anticipates the work of later women writers such as Charlotte Brontë (see Section entitled "Christianity Reconceived" in Chapter V) and activists in the first feminist movement such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who published a controversial revision of the Bible entitled *The Woman's Bible* (1895).

creation was only created for his convenience or pleasure. (26)

By invoking religious authoritative discourse, Wollstonecraft appears to be working within the boundaries of male-dominated ideology, as she references "Moses," "Adam's ribs," "Eve," and "creation." Rhetorically, her ability to address this biblical "story" indicates that she, like any proper 18<sup>th</sup> century woman, has some knowledge of Biblical Scripture, thus anticipating attacks on her ignorance of woman's God-given duty. However, by referring to the Scriptural rendering of Creation as a "story" authored by Moses, Wollstonecraft draws attention to the fact that it was written—not by an omnipotent God—but by a fallible man who might, in exercising his own will, "exert his strength to subjugate his companion." In describing it as a "poetical" work of "invention" she underscores its aesthetic and didactic (and therefore allegorical) functions, as she remarks that "few...who have bestowed any serious thought on the subject, ever supposed that Eve was, literally speaking, one of Adam's ribs." Her suggestion that those capable of rational thought could not take the story "literally" questions religious representation of it as an historical 'fact' by which to justify the oppression of women (as a mere 'extension' of Adam's body). As a whole, Wollstonecraft's response to Moses's "work-utterance" simultaneously demonstrates her investment in that work (as worthy of response) as well as her rejection of it as indicative of man's desire for "convenience or pleasure."

Wollstonecraft's response to Scripture extends beyond the parameters of acceptance and rejection (or mere transmission of that discourse), however. In the subsequent paragraph, she writes:

Let it not be concluded that I wish to invert the order of things; I have already granted, that, from the constitution of their bodies, men seem to be designed by Providence to attain a greater degree of virtue. I speak collectively of the whole sex; but I see not the shadow of a reason to conclude that their virtues should differ in respect to their nature. In fact, how can they, if virtue has only one eternal standard? I must therefore, if I reason consequentially, as strenuously maintain that they have the same simple direction, as that there is a God. (26)

Perhaps acknowledging that she has gone too far in questioning Moses's "poetical story," Wollstonecraft suggests that she does not "wish to invert the order of things"—or supplant a masculine religious discourse with a feminine one. However, having dismissed his story on the grounds that it is "poetical" rather than factual, she invokes "God" as the Being that might properly "invent" an "eternal standard" of "virtue." Wollstonecraft thus appropriates Moses's God as the means to correct his "convenient" rendering of Creation and as a "standard" by which to "maintain"

that virtue for men and women should both "have the same simple direction."

In the following chapter, Wollstonecraft again invokes God as "the supreme Being" or the "only solid foundation for morality," reinforcing her distinction between the will of God and the will of men. She suggests that

[f]or to love God as the fountain of wisdom, goodness, and power, appears to be the only worship useful to a being who wishes to acquire either virtue or knowledge. A blind unsettled affection may, like human passions, occupy the mind and warm the heart, whilst, to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God, is forgotten...if women be educated for dependence; that is, to act according to the will of another fallible being [man], and submit, right or wrong, to power, where are we to stop?" (46, 48)

Alluding to a line in the Old Testament book of Micah, "What doth the lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (6:8), Wollstonecraft manipulates Scripture to question women's "dependence" on "fallible being[s]." Suggesting that, if allowed to act according to God's "wisdom, goodness, and power," women might, as Micah advises, "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God," Wollstonecraft undermines the notion that women should access God through men. Rather, she indicates that a "blind unsettled affection" might lead to acquiescence to the "wrong" sort of

"power," thus rendering women "answerable for their conduct to a higher tribunal, liable to error" (48). By revealing the potentially edifying effects of allowing women direct access to Scripture, Wollstonecraft appropriates God as a means of feminine access to "virtue," "knowledge," and even "power."

Having called into question long-standing religious doctrine, Wollstonecraft takes a similar approach to the work of her contemporaries. In the following passage, it is possible to locate—not just an investment in political concerns—but an assimilation of Thomas Paine's discourse from his influential treatise on the *Rights of Man*. Wollstonecraft writes:

Such a woman is not a more irrational monster than some of the Roman Emperors, who were depraved by lawless power. Yet, since kings have been more under the restraint of law, and the curb, however weak, of honour, the records of history are not filled with such unnatural instances of folly and cruelty, nor does the despotism that kills virtue and genius in the bud, hover over Europe with that destructive blast which desolates Turkey, and renders the men, as well as the soil, unfruitful...Let not men in the pride of power, use the same arguments that tyrannic kings and venal ministers have used, and fallaciously assert that woman ought to be subjected because she has always been so. -But, when man, governed by reasonable laws, enjoys his natural freedom, let him despise

woman, if she do not share it with him; and, till that glorious period arrives, in descanting on the folly of the sex, let him not overlook his own. (44-45)

There are various discursive similarities in this excerpt from *Rights of Man*, indicating that it is a text to which *Vindication* "responds:"

...The natural moderation of Louis XVI contributed nothing to alter the hereditary despotism of the Monarchy. All the tyrannies of former reigns, acted under that hereditary despotism, were still liable to be revived in the hands of a successor. A casual discontinuance of the practice of despotism, is not a discontinuance of its principles; the former depends on the virtue of the individual who is in immediate possession of the power; the latter, on the virtue and fortitude of the nation...But men who can consign over the rights of posterity for ever on the authority of a mouldy parchment, like Mr. Burke, are not qualified to judge of this Revolution. It takes in a field too vast for their views to explore, and proceeds with a mightiness of reason they cannot keep pace with. (78)

Notice how Wollstonecraft's argument for the 'rights of woman' is couched in Paine's discourse concerning the *Rights of Man*. She incorporates radical philosophic terms such as "despotism," "virtue," "reason," and "power," using Paine's critique of "hereditary despotism" as a means of launching her own arguments



against women's abuse of "lawless power" and men's subjugation of women. Although Paine, like Locke and Rousseau, does not extend the "rights of posterity" to women, Wollstonecraft does not "stylize" or "vary" Paine's argument by explicitly suggesting the obvious—that Paine's argument for a "Nation" in which "every citizen is a member of the sovereignty" (82) should include women as well. However, what initially appears to be a "total affirmation" of Paine's authoritative discourse shifts to Wollstonecraft's appropriation of that discourse for her own purposes, as she extends Paine's argument regarding "the hereditary despotism of the Monarchy" to women and finally suggests that, in a condition of "natural freedom," man would "despise woman" if she were not also "governed by reasonable laws." Hence, in the course of one passage Wollstonecraft approaches Paine's discourse as both authoritative, as she does not initially revise it to allow for the rights of woman, and internally persuasive, as she ultimately assimilates it, thus "awakening new and independent words" that criticize men such as Paine for failing to recognize their own complicity in using "the same arguments that tyrannic kings and venal ministers have used, [to] fallaciously assert that woman ought to be subjected because she has always been so."

*Vindication* not only appropriates authoritative discourses that Wollstonecraft seems to accept or respect, but also those that she "totally rejects." In his influential educational

treatise entitled *Émile*,<sup>9</sup> which Wollstonecraft openly repudiates in *Vindication*, Rousseau suggests that, in accordance with the laws of "Nature," "a woman who is naturally weak...must have the skill to incline [men] to do every thing which her sex will not enable her to do herself, and which is necessary and agreeable to her...She should learn to penetrate into [men's] real sentiments from their conversation, their actions, their looks, and gestures" (349-50). To achieve this end, she is equipped with the "natural gift" of "cunning" and the "distinctive character[]" of "coquetry" (348). In the following passage, Wollstonecraft "attacks" Rousseau's position regarding the "natural" role of women in society:

Rousseau declares that a woman should never, for a moment, feel herself independent, that she should be governed by fear to exercise her natural cunning, and made a coquettish slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire, a sweeter companion to man, whenever he chooses to relax himself. He carries his arguments, which he pretends to draw from the indications of nature, still further, and insinuates that truth and fortitude, the corner stones of all human virtue, should be cultivated with certain restrictions, because, with respect to the female character, obedience is the grand lesson which ought

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<sup>9</sup> For a more thorough discussion of *Émile* and Rousseau's conception of womanhood, see Chapter III.

to be impressed with unrelenting rigour...What nonsense!  
when will a great man arise with sufficient strength  
of mind to puff away the fumes which pride and  
sensuality have thus spread over the subject! If women  
are by nature inferior to men, their virtues must be  
the same in quality, if not in degree, or virtue is a  
relative idea; consequently, their conduct should be  
founded on the same principles, and have the same aim.  
(25-26)

As Bakhtin's account of authoritative discourse suggests,  
Wollstonecraft's "total rejection" of Rousseau's discourse  
serves—to a degree—to facilitate its transmission. As it is  
"indissolubly fused with its authority—with political power, an  
institution, a person—and ... stands and falls together with that  
authority," Wollstonecraft's argument is grounded in an implicit  
acceptance of the terms of Rousseau's discourse. Terms like  
"coquette," "cunning," "nature," "virtue," and "obedience"  
initially define woman and her sphere of action, but immediately  
following this vehement attack of Rousseau, Wollstonecraft  
exclaims "What Nonsense!" and commences to offer her own  
assimilation of his authoritative word. Appropriating Rousseau's  
notion of virtue, Wollstonecraft argues that women should have  
"virtues" that are "the same in quality, if not in degree" to  
those of men. Although she does not explicitly redefine the term,  
her assertion that it must "be founded on the same principles,

and have the same aim" as virtue in men alludes to a potential "rescripting" of the term according to her own principles.

As these examples indicate, Wollstonecraft's argument in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is at once both a transmission of masculine authoritative discourse and an assimilation of that discourse into her own internally persuasive "word[s]"—what I have called an appropriation of it. Such a text inevitably appears to digress or contradict, since Wollstonecraft "transmits" and appropriates the discourses of a variety of different authorities whose ideals often resist one another; beyond Paine and Rousseau, she takes on Pope, Milton, and Dr. John Gregory, among others. Readers anticipating a consistent defense or attack concerning the rights of woman are instead left to assess their relationship to the multitude of authoritative voices "interwoven with" Wollstonecraft's—to determine how (if at all) two ideals operating within separate discursive registers ("virtue" as per Rousseau & educational theory vs. "natural freedom" from Paine & 18<sup>th</sup> century political thought) can coexist as penultimate goals for Wollstonecraft's "revolution in female manners" (45).

This is not, however, to limit the text's discursive possibility to Wollstonecraft's struggle with (and appropriation of) authoritative discourse. As a writer for the *Analytical Review*, Wollstonecraft read the work of women writers whose discourse was not recognized as authoritative. One such woman (whom Wollstonecraft reviewed favorably) was known for her

*History of England from the Accession of James I to that of the Brunswick Line* (1763-84), her "Whig sympathies," and a controversial second marriage to a man 36 years her junior (Damrosch, et al. 247). As Ralph Wardle and others have noted, Wollstonecraft "was considerably indebted to [Catharine Macaulay's *Letters on Education* (1790)] for the formation of her own thesis...for in the Rights of Woman she was to repeat and develop almost every point which Mrs. Macaulay had made" (Poston 219). A quick perusal of Macaulay's section headings reveals the extent of Wollstonecraft's indebtedness (she had reviewed *Letters* for the *Analytical Review*). References to "the Same" education for "Boys and Girls," the lack of "Difference in Sex," and a critique of the art of "Coquetry" indicate a substantial overlap between the ways in which these two women hope to ameliorate the condition of their sex. Consider the following passage from Macaulay's *Letters* in relation to Wollstonecraft's invective against Rousseau (above):

Among the most strenuous asserters of sexual difference in character, Rousseau is the most conspicuous...never did enthusiasms and the love of paradox, those enemies to philosophical disquisition, appear in more strong opposition to plain sense than in Rousseau's definition of this difference. He sets out with a supposition, that Nature intended to the subjection of the one sex to the other; that consequently there must be an inferiority of intellect

in the subjected party; but as a man is a very imperfect being, and apt to play the capricious tyrant, Nature, to bring things nearer to an equality, bestowed on the woman such attractive graces, and such an insinuating address, as to turn the balance on the other scale. Thus nature, in a giddy mood, recedes from her purposes, and subjects prerogative to an influence which must produce confusion and disorder in the system of human affairs. Rousseau saw this objection; and in order to obviate it, he has made up a moral person of the union of the two sexes, which, for contradiction and absurdity, outdoes every metaphysical riddle that was ever formed in the schools. In short, it is not reason, it is not wit; it is pride and sensuality that speak in Rousseau, and in this instance, has lowered the man of genius to the licentious pendant. (208)

Despite the difference in the tone of the two critiques, as Wollstonecraft, in accordance with 18<sup>th</sup> century polemic style, engages in an ad hominem attack of Rousseau, while Macaulay carefully explains Rousseau's position so as to be understood by a young pupil, the general course of these two arguments is very similar. Like Macaulay, Wollstonecraft seeks to expose the flaws in Rousseau's doctrine of "sexual difference." Both women refer to his alleged adherence to the immutable laws of "Nature," his conception of woman as the "subjugated" or "inferior" sex,

finally emphasizing the "absurdity" or "nonsens[ical]" nature of this perspective—attributing it to "pride and sensuality." However, although Macaulay later refers to the manner in which "[t]he principles and nature of virtue, which is never properly explained to boys, is kept quite a mystery to girls" (209), she does not, like Wollstonecraft, move toward a redefinition of Rousseau's notion of virtue. Thus, Wollstonecraft extends Macaulay's argument, as she "rescripts" masculine authoritative discourse for the purposes of establishing a (very) latent feminist discourse—one in which masculine ideals such as "virtue" might be applied to women as well.

Overall, *Vindication* cannot be classified according to one specific argumentative approach or mode of discourse. Wollstonecraft did not write feminism's "manifesto," but struggled to recontextualize seemingly authoritative discourses amongst others that would necessarily undermine them: Rousseau's doctrine of sexual difference could not stand long in conversation with Paine's Doctrine of Equal Rights. Conventional feminist categories like 'radical' and 'moderate' may accurately characterize specific moments in *Vindication*, but they cannot encompass the entirety of what the text is—Wollstonecraft's response to a multitude of other "work-utterances" that she ultimately appropriates to establish *the Rights of Woman*. As I will argue in subsequent chapters, Wollstonecraft engages in a similar approach to masculine discourses in her pedagogical

writing as well, working to recast didactic convention and further define the terms of feminine virtue and rationality.



## 2.0 (RE)READING THE FEMALE READER

Although book historians have found only one existing edition, Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Female Reader* is worth rereading—not for its 'originality' (as in the case of *Vindication*), but for its revisions of the conventional 18<sup>th</sup> century approach to elocution. It is well known that Wollstonecraft made a living before the publication of her groundbreaking *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) writing and compiling didactic texts for young women. I will discuss *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) and *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788) later, in some detail, but here I'll note that these books, like *The Female Reader*, ostensibly reinforce rather than resist normative educational standards for women. This seeming inconsistency between Wollstonecraft's pedagogical and polemical works is often remarked upon by feminist critics.<sup>10</sup> Wollstonecraft herself in a famous passage from *The Vindication* provides the basic terms of this cultural analysis of "accomplishment" based education, which is what she offers (at least in part) in her own pedagogical works. She writes:

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Moira Ferguson's Introduction to the reprint of *The Female Reader* and Janet Todd's *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life*.

The education of women has, of late, been more attended to than formerly; yet they are still reckoned a frivolous sex, and ridiculed or pitied by the writers who endeavor by satire or instruction to improve them. It is acknowledged that they spend many of the first years of their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments; meanwhile strength of mind and body are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves,— the only way women can rise in the world,— by marriage. And this desire making mere animals of them, when they marry they act as children are expected to act:— they dress, they paint, they nickname God's creatures.— Surely these weak beings are only fit for a seraglio!... I may be accused of arrogance; still I must declare that what I firmly believe, that all the writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners from Rousseau to Dr. Gregory, have contributed to render women more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been; and, consequently, more useless members of society. \*\*\*My objection extends to the whole purport of those books, which tend, in my opinion, to degrade one half of the human species, and render women pleasing at the expense of every solid virtue. (212-13, 218)

Wollstonecraft adamantly disapproves of Dr. Gregory and "the whole purport of those books" that are comparable to his advice book for young women, yet she includes excerpts from his work in *The Female Reader* (1789), among other selections that might also be said to "render women pleasing at the expense of every solid virtue." As a result, *The Female Reader* seems at variance with the reconceptualization of women's education (as the "strengthening of mind and body") that Wollstonecraft proposes in *Vindication*. However, in Chapter I, I point to the ways in which Wollstonecraft appropriates masculine authoritative discourse in the process of establishing her feminist project. Like *Vindication*, *The Female Reader* appropriates established masculine discourses on the subject of women's education by recontextualizing them amongst others that may be read to call them into question, thus inviting young women to engage and struggle with the same "authoritative discourses" regarding womanhood that Wollstonecraft herself struggled with. This chapter will situate Wollstonecraft's *Reader* within the larger historical debate concerning women's reading practices in the late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, thus marking its relationship to other didactic texts for women during this time. I will argue that *The Female Reader* manipulates the generic hybridity of the didactic tradition, generating a feminist pedagogy that calls into question and potentially undermines masculine authoritative discourse concerning women's 'proper sphere.'

Feminist critics and book historians such as Cathy Davidson, Kate Flint, Barbara Sicherman, Harvey Graff, Richard Altick, Reinhard Wittmann, Martyn Lyons, and others have commented on how the "reading revolution" of the late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries served to undermine the emphasis on traditional moral didactic reading practices for women. The critical tendency has been to emphasize the novel's role as a genre that provided women with access to a more secularized form of education that was ultimately liberating as it introduced women to "the ways of the world" (Davidson 172). Citing Bakhtin, Davidson argues that "the complex intellectual and emotional activity of reading fiction empowers the hitherto powerless individual, at least imaginatively, by authorizing necessarily private responses to texts that function primarily as repositories for those responses" (162). Hence, readers of the novel are "empower[ed]" to determine to what extent the texts' portrayals of women and their roles in society are legitimate ones. The way in which the novel engages in "dialogue" with readers is ultimately that which has distinguished it as a potentially subversive form. While the novel is often praised for its educational as well as liberating functions, texts that were packaged and/ or marketed as didactic such as the conduct book and the woman's reader, are commonly disregarded as reinforcing moral and domestic education for women, or as subverting the new secular pedagogy that facilitated women's progress in moving beyond the domestic sphere.

Yet the boundaries between novelistic and didactic discourses were often fluid and shifting during this revolutionary juncture in print history. Book historians such as Cathy Davidson and Martyn Lyons address the overlapping of didactic and novelistic discourses during the reading revolution, when writers and publishers sought to maintain marketability for texts that might be perceived as too 'risqué' and to cater to readers that still understood reading primarily as a means of moral edification. Yet traditional moral didactic features of women's didactic texts have often been seen as exemplary of the misogynist ideologies that may have served as an impetus to their production. In *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987), Nancy Armstrong represents them as an accessory to the dominant ideology, characterizing the function of women's "conduct books" (which would fall under the "social guide" designation, and may also be termed "advice manual") as the writer's attempt to "define" and disseminate her/his understanding of women's purpose in 18<sup>th</sup> century England: She writes: "...many different kinds of writers felt compelled to add their wrinkles to the female character...one can usually infer a social identity from the female virtues to which the writer grants highest priority, for these virtues are inevitably linked to functions which writer feels are essential to good household management" (65). Similarly, in "Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life, 1866-1910," Nan Johnson investigates women's "rhetoric manuals" in post Civil War America, and explains that

didactic texts for women may have served to relegate women to a "domestic rhetorical sphere" (33). Although Kate Flint provides an excellent analysis of some of the ways in which advice manuals worked to direct and restrict women's reading, helping them to establish reading habits meant to exercise "memory" and "reasoning," even encouraging them to read critically, she ultimately dismisses these findings and the texts themselves as "a confirmation and consolidation of the dominant ideology of the period" (116). Davidson gives the didactic text little more than a brief (although positive) nod in her fourth chapter of *Revolution and the Word*,<sup>11</sup> and in a later chapter defines the advice manual in the conventional manner—as "represent[ative] [of] the conservative or traditional role of women" (126). In both Davidson and Flint, this characterization of the advice manual simultaneously serves to stigmatize it as a product of the dominant ideology, while (either implicitly or explicitly) highlighting the empowering function of the novel.

In accordance with Wollstonecraft's own critique of "those books" that "degrade one half of the human species, and render women pleasing at the expense of every solid virtue," didactic

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<sup>11</sup> In her discussion of the novel's effect on female readers, Davidson also acknowledges the role of didactic texts in general as having had an important function in post-Revolution America. She explains that "publishers were quick to meet a growing demand for self-help books and social guides, textbooks and teacher's manuals...[etc]. The very proliferation of these self-improvement books attests to an emerging, broadly based interest in education that encompassed men and women, city and country citizens, and specifically addressed unprivileged readers" (65, 69). She also addresses a few "teacher's manuals" that she considers to demonstrate a progressive pedagogy inspired by "educational reformers" (68).

texts for women *did* function to consolidate the dominant ideology of the period, discussing issues of women's dress and decorum with the same meticulous detail as one might encounter in a present day textbook on geography or science. However, in dismissing didactic texts for women as always reinforcing the dominant ideology regarding women's roles, we risk overlooking the unique possibilities didactic traditions opened up for women writers. Although didactic texts were usually marketed and "packaged" as acceptable according to traditional conceptions of women's education, their contents did not necessarily reflect the paratextual materials. With the exception of certain 'single author' conduct books, which I address below, didactic texts geared toward women were not necessarily consistent entities that cohered to one overriding project, as the writer of a didactic text for women often compiled and/or adapted preexisting materials, themes, or strategies—which might or might not have aligned with the project asserted or advertised in the prefatory note and other surrounding paratext. Like *Vindication*, these texts might be read as responses to or dialogues among the "work-utterances" of other writers that often vary or even disagree in opinion, and therefore the texts often seem to lack argumentative coherence—what appears to be a definition of the writer's project in a preface may be called into question or even directly contradicted by other components of the text. This was especially true of the elocutionary reader, as the anthology was usually comprised of a set of reading passages collected from various

(and sometimes disparate) sources. The discursive hybridity of didactic traditions provided Wollstonecraft with the authorial latitude to appropriate and organize pre-existing texts in subversive ways. I will read *The Female Reader* in relation to two widely circulating conduct books to argue that Wollstonecraft recasts these approaches by placing them 'in conversation with' other 18<sup>th</sup> century perspectives regarding women's proper sphere.

## **2.1 ESTABLISHING DIDACTIC CONVENTION: THE ENDEARING FATHER AND THE MORALIZING MENTOR**

Didactic texts for women are interesting and complicated textual artifacts, even when they function to disseminate established masculine discourses regarding women's roles. Probably the most widely circulating form of didactic text devoted to the 'improvement' of women was the conduct book, also referred to in critical contexts as the "advice manual." Hoping to position and engage readers as 'receptive pupils' and to offset their otherwise monologic approach to instruction, writers/compiler of conduct books incorporated didactic apparatuses of various sorts (tables of contents, headings, prefaces) and enlisted certain stylistic features of the novel in service of their didactic projects. Bakhtin provides a comprehensive analysis of novelistic discourse in terms of its differences from other discursive modes (such as didacticism); and, his theory of novelistic discourse



which breaks down the components of novelistic style into specific "compositional-stylistic unities" provides a way of understanding how didactic texts deployed novelistic strategies in order to engage readers. The most common novelistic strategy employed by didactic texts is the "stylization of the various forms or semiliterary (written) everyday narration (the letter, the diary, etc.)" (Bakhtin, "Novel" 262). For example, one of the most effective uses of this type of "stylization" appears in Susanna Rowson's widely-circulating novel entitled *Charlotte Temple*. Cathy Davidson explains how Rowson's own interjections within the plot sequence<sup>12</sup> demonstrate to her readers that she is reaching out to a formerly ignored readership of "the young woman reading her way into adulthood in a society in which neither she nor her reading is taken seriously" (xvii). Rowson's intermittent use of "everyday narration" in which she addresses her readers as though she were writing them a personal letter serves to endear her "as a concerned parent, a counseling friend" (Davidson xvii).

Susanna Rowson's approach of speaking directly to (and attempting to endear herself to) a young female readership was a common approach in earlier didactic texts for women.<sup>13</sup> Seventeen

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<sup>12</sup> *Charlotte Temple* is the story of a poor, young English woman who, misled by a dissolute schoolteacher, allows herself to be seduced by a wealthier man. She travels with him to the U.S., where he (tricked by a conniving friend) deserts her for a more desirable woman. At the end, despite her parents' hopes for her return, she dies homeless and alone after the birth of her illegitimate child.

<sup>13</sup> A multitude of didactic novels and didactic texts for women circulating during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries deployed stylistic

years before the publication of *Charlotte Temple*, women were reading one of the most widely-circulating conduct books of the late 18<sup>th</sup> to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, Dr. John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*. These "Letters...[supposedly] written by a tender father, in a declining state of health, for the instruction of his daughters, and not intended for the public" (Gregory A3) were originally published in London in 1774 and, selling "by the thousands" (Wardle 216), went through an estimated print run of 19, 500 copies between 1774 and 1813 (St. Clair 604). The intention of engendering a "friendship" with the reader is established early on in *Legacy*, as Gregory suggests that "...you will hear, at least for once in your lives, the genuine sentiments of a man who has no interest in flattering or deceiving you.—I shall throw my reflections together without any studied order, and shall only, to avoid confusion, range them under a few general heads" (6). The Preface's presentation of the text as a private "legacy" addressed to a specific set of "daughters" that its readers (or "you") might 'overhear' invites readers to engage in an intimate relationship with the so-called

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attributes of the novel in order to entertain and edify readers. The following texts deploy strategies similar to those I discuss here: *The Governess: or, Little Female Academy* (Sarah Fielding 1749), *Mentoria* (Ann Murry 1778), *Original Stories from Real Life* (Mary Wollstonecraft 1788), *The Young Lady's Parental Monitor: Containing I. Dr. Gregory's Father's Legacy to his Daughters. II. Lady Pennington's Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Absent Daughters. III. Marchioness de Lambert's Advice of a mother to her daughter.* (1790), *Letters on Subjects of Importance to the Happiness of Young Females, Addresses by a Governess to her Pupils* (Helena Whitford 1799), and *A Mirror for the Female Sex: Historical Beauties for Young Ladies, Intended to Lead the Female Mind to the Love and Practice of Moral Goodness* (Mary Pilkington 1799).

"father." Undoubtedly hoping that the intimacy of the relationship he has established will preclude any disagreement with his educational precepts, Gregory makes his authority seem even less obtrusive by generating an air of uncertainty about the extent of his knowledge, as he suggests that "the advices which I shall give you will be very imperfect, as there are many nameless delicacies in female manners, of which none but a woman can judge" (11). Despite the inherently authoritative persona of the patriarchal father, readers are not directly confronted by "authoritative discourse," or asked to "'recite[] by heart'" (Bakhtin, "Novel" 341) that which he dictates, but are invited to *consider* "the genuine sentiments" of a father-figure who, unlike a real father, will not command his daughter to "look at me while I'm talking!" but remains physically absent. Also, this less intrusive authority has "head[ed]" and "range[d]" his subjects so that she can revisit and therefore (ideally speaking) reconsider them—dismissing that which ultimately does not "matter to" her (Bakhtin, "Novel" 345). Thus, as a result of Gregory's simultaneously authoritative yet non-threatening persona, the readerly "daughter" can, despite the norm in 18<sup>th</sup> century society, regard her "father" as her friend.

However, this "friend" may not be described as secular and liberating in the way that Rowson is: Gregory does not "tell[] the reader that she is not alone in a world in which she has not legal or political identity" by sympathizing with her plight (Davidson xvii). Instead, Gregory focuses on how she might avoid

such moral degradations, for the Charlotte Temples of the world would not exist had they followed his guidelines for proper female behavior; as he writes, "While I explain to you that system of conduct which I think will tend most to your honor and happiness, I shall, at the same time, endeavor to point out those virtues and accomplishments which render you most respectable and most amiable in the eyes of my own sex" (8). Although a woman might second guess such sentiments, in the absence of the other stylistic unities of the novel, Gregory's text does not provide any other perspectives (utilizing someone else's discourse) beyond his own "unmediated, direct" suggestions (Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky" 189). While readers might experience all of the ways in which Charlotte Temple was affected by the other characters in the novel, and conclude that her plight was not entirely her fault, such a woman represented in an "unmediated discourse" has only herself to blame. For instance, Gregory writes, "As I look on your choice of husband to be of the greatest consequence to your happiness, I hope you will make it with the utmost circumspection. Do not give way to a sudden sally of passion, and dignify it in the name of love" (126). Here, we cannot see, even with a slight "orientation toward someone else's discourse" what passionate "sally" may "sudden[ly]" overtake a young woman, or by what insidious means her "circumspection" may be suppressed. On the other hand, Rowson enables readers to envision Charlotte's temptations—embodying them in the language of a profligate schoolmistress and a convincing, handsome young man.

Although more limited in scope than *Charlotte Temple*, *Legacy* introduces readers to stylized letter format—a common component of novelistic discourse—which allows Gregory to approach his audience as “friend.” He by no means hopes however to encourage his daughters (or readers in general) to befriend other texts that might have a similar effect. Gregory is so concerned about the potential repercussions involved in improper reading choices that he suggests that he is at a “great[] loss” (54) in terms of what to recommend, but provides very specific instructions in terms of what to avoid:

But if you find, on a strict self-examination, that marriage is absolutely essential to your happiness...shun as you would do the most fatal poison all species of reading...which warms the imagination, which engages and softens the heart, and raises the taste above the level of common life. If you do otherwise, consider the terrible conflict of passions this may afterwards raise in your breasts. If this refinement once takes deep root in your minds, and you do not obey its dictates, but marry from vulgar and mercenary views, you may never be able to eradicate it entirely, and then it will embitter all your married days. (117-118)

Gregory voices one of the most common fears in regards to women’s reading—that inciting the “imagination” will render a woman incapable of accepting the realities of married life (Flint 74).

Although Gregory utilizes a novelistic convention to lure readers into a relationship with the text, he simultaneously reminds women that they should not seek out and enter into such a relationship with other, less suitable texts. Hence, the didactic text becomes a site of uncomfortable tension between catering to "worldly" interests and maintaining a relationship to traditional moral didacticism. However, Gregory's moralizing advice is offered in a 'loving' manner that essays to convince readers to embrace that discourse. He does not suggest that such reading will render women poor and useless wives from a masculine perspective, but expresses concern for the fact that it will "embitter" their lives. In a similar instance, Gregory indicates a sincere desire to assist his daughters in making good marital choices. He writes "...I could never pretend to advise whom you should marry; but I can with great confidence advise whom you should not marry...Do not marry a fool; he is the most intractable of all animals; he is led by his passions and caprices, and is incapable of hearing the voice of reason...A rake is always a suspicious husband, because he has only known the most worthless of your sex..." (123-124). By trying to convince readers that he is concerned with their happiness and well-being in the world (unlike the "fatal poison" offered by the salacious novel), Gregory invites young women to embrace his moral didactic message regarding womanhood—ultimately that marriage is "of greatest consequence to your happiness."

"Frequently praised, reprinted, anthologized, quoted from, and copied by others" (St. Clair 592), Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773), like *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*, boasted an "extraordinarily long print run" (St. Clair 275). Chapone was part of a group of conservative yet "well-educated" 18<sup>th</sup> century women known as the Bluestockings, and her *Letters* "became a standard text for issue to young ladies, a handbook on the acquisition of respectable middle-class femininity" (Guest 60).<sup>14</sup> In service of this project, Chapone establishes herself as a mentor to her "niece" or to "you," her readers; and, although "you" have "parents, who are both capable and desirous of giving you all proper instruction, yet I who love you so tenderly, cannot help fondly wishing to contribute something, if possible, to your improvement and welfare" (6). However, whereas Gregory attempts to deemphasize his authoritative persona by suggesting the potentially fallible nature of his masculine perspective on certain subjects that "none but a woman can judge" (11), Chapone makes a more direct claim to her reader's "attention," suggesting that "I will hope that [you] may be engaged, by seeing on paper, from the hand of one of your warmest friends, Truths of the highest importance, which, though you may not find new, can never be too deeply engraven on your mind" (6). Also, unlike Gregory, Chapone offers

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<sup>14</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the Bluestockings and their political and literary contributions to late 18<sup>th</sup> century society, see Harriet Guest's "Bluestocking Feminism" in *Reconsidering the Bluestockings* (2003).

instruction not only in religion and marriage but also in geography and history, which would ultimately become relatively standard school subjects for young women. However, the letters devoted to "Geography and Chronology" as well as "the Manner and Course of Reading History" do little to offset (intellectually) the normative regimen established in the first eight letters involving "Study of the Holy Scripture," "the Regulation of the Heart and Affections," "the Government of the Temper," "Economy" (or household management), and "Politeness and Accomplishments." Chapone also reinforces the idea of marriage as essential to a woman's happiness, making evident the necessity for all of her previous advice concerning religion and decorum:

If you love virtue sincerely, you will be incapable of loving an openly vicious character. But, alas!—your innocent heart may be easily ensnared by an artful one—and from this danger nothing can secure you but the experience of those, to whose guidance God has entrusted you: may you be wise enough to make use of it!—So will you have the [surest?] chance of attaining the best blessings this world can afford, in a faithful and virtuous union with a worthy man, who may direct your steps in safety and honour through this life, and partake with you the rewards of virtue in that which is to come. (72)

By calling attention to the importance of ensuring "a faithful and virtuous union with a worthy man," suggesting that her



niece/readers "be wise enough" to enlist the aid of an experienced guardian in making a decision, Chapone has more to offer on the subject than Gregory, who suggests he can only advise "whom you should not marry." She further elaborates on the subject of marriage, suggesting that "whatever romantic notions you may hear, or read of, depend upon it, those matches are the happiest which are made on rational grounds" going on to admonish those who might consider following "passion" over "duty and prudence." Although she does not embark on a full-fledged attack of reading for pleasure, Chapone also hints at the detrimental effects such reading might engender, as it allows for the cultivation of "romantic notions" that could undermine the potential for a match made on "rational grounds" (which is ultimately, Chapone implies, one that aligns with the parent's choice). She does allow for the possibility of remaining single (what Gregory refers to disparagingly as becoming an "old maid"), but it is ambiguously left to the intervention of "Providence," and presented as a 'last resort' when all other (marital) options fail. Chapone further disassociates readers from this option by talking about it in relation to "the unmarried woman" rather than in relation to "you:" "But, if this happy lot [marriage] be denied you, do not be afraid of a single life. A worthy woman is never destitute of valuable friends, who in a great measure supply to her the want of nearer connections...The calamities of an unhappy marriage are so much greater than can befall a single person, that the unmarried woman may find abundant argument to be

contented with her condition, when pointed out to her by Providence" (73).

These texts seem (aesthetically speaking) to achieve little beyond hailing readers into a particular subject position—that of aspiring middle class wife; therefore, it is easy to see why Wollstonecraft (as well as feminist critics) "object[ed]" "to the whole purport of those books, which tend, in my opinion, to degrade one half of the human species, and render women pleasing at the expense of every solid virtue." Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Female Reader*, although ostensibly reinforcing normative educational standards for women, recontextualizes these conventional approaches to women's education in such a way that readers might struggle with (rather than submit to) their advice. Her approach invites us to rethink the binary between feminism and didacticism—to imagine the possibility that women's didactic writing might be read as a subversive form.

## **2.2 THE FEMALE READER: RECONTEXTUALIZING CONVENTIONAL ADVICE**

The elocutionary movement that flourished from the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century as a means to enable British provincials to speak in the proper "'English tongue'" (Miller quoting Sheridan 18) became a common subject of study in both England and the U.S. Texts compiled in response to this movement, such as William Enfield's

widely-circulating elocutionary reader entitled *The Speaker* (1774), usually incorporated an apparatus that modeled how to pronounce letters appropriately and to pay attention to aspects of oral delivery such as intonation and speed (Cohen 107). The apparatus was followed by an anthology of passages to practice reading, often comprised of excerpts from various contemporary and/or canonical authors' works in both poetry and prose, usually including "...excerpts of select sentences, poetry, fiction, drama, dialogues, historical narrative, descriptive passages, and essays" (Carr, Carr, and Schultz 112). Carr, Carr, and Schultz emphasize the cultural influence of the reader in the United States, suggesting that such texts "helped create a vocabulary for feelings, beliefs, and values, and the activity populated the imagination with biographies, narratives, dialogues, and poetic expression, with what would become literary culture" (85).

Depending on a woman's social and economic status, practicing proper elocution in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century could mean learning to sound like a lady, or, if one was already a lady, to add to one's repertoire of accomplishments—reading aloud or reciting a passage was an activity that might entertain a group of family, friends, or suitors. Writers/compilers of the women's reader often claimed that the selection of readings they included in the anthology would improve the minds and character of young

ladies.<sup>15</sup> Addressing 19<sup>th</sup> century "advanced readers designated for girls," Carr, Carr, and Shultz argue that these texts "mark gender differences" by "diminish[ing] the traditional emphasis on public oratory and politics, and favor[ing] the kind of writing about daily life circulating in women's fiction and periodicals" (125). Because elocutionary readers for women emphasize the domestic rather than the public sphere as the appropriate site for elocutionary performance, critics such as Nan Johnson view such books as texts that reinforced normative educational standards for women.

Compiling one of the first elocutionary textbooks for women in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>16</sup> Wollstonecraft manipulated the limited set of feminine-appropriate materials she had to draw from in complex and interesting ways. Hired in 1788 to review contemporary writing for Joseph Johnson's *Analytical Review*, Wollstonecraft had professional experience when it came to

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<sup>15</sup> For instance, the widely-circulating American reader entitled *The Hemans Reader for Female Schools* (1847) argued that "The Lessons, contained in this book, have been selected with great care, from a large amount of material examined for the purpose. Every article has been carefully studied with reference to its instructive character...especially with regard to its adaptedness to the cultivation of the female mind and heart" (Preface).

<sup>16</sup> For other examples of elocutionary textbooks for women, see the following: *The Lady's Preceptor; or, a Series of Instructive and Pleasing Exercises in Reading; for the Particular use of Females; Consisting of a Selection of Moral Essays, Narratives, Letters* (Mr. Cresswick 1792), *The Female Speaker* (Anna Laetitia Barbauld 1811), *Elegant Lessons, or The Young Lady's Preceptor* (Samuel Whiting 1824), *Introduction to The Young Ladies' Elocutionary Reader: Containing a Selection of Reading Lessons, Together with the Rudiments of Elocution: Adapted to Female Readers* (William & Ann Russell 1845), *The Heman's Reader for Female Schools: Containing Extracts in Prose and Poetry*. (T. S. Pinneo 1847), *Young Ladies' Reader* (Charles Sanders 1865), and *Five Minute Readings for Young Ladies* (Walter Fobes 1886).

reading and writing critically about what contemporaries had to offer on the subject of women's education. As *Vindication's* Chapter V entitled "Animadversions on Some of the Writers Who Have Rendered Women Objects of Pity, Bordering on Contempt" suggests, this experience gave her particular insight into the relationships between various authorities on the subject of women's education in terms of how their theories reflected and differed from one another. In the Preface to *The Female Reader*, she states: "In the present volume ..., the subjects are not only arranged in separate books, but are carefully disposed in a series that tends to make them illustrate each other; linking the detached pieces seems to give an interest to the whole, which even the slightest connection will not fail to produce" (iv). Here, Wollstonecraft explains that she has not only arranged passages according to conventional generic groupings, but that she has also arranged them by subject within those broader headings. Even if the text cannot fully dramatize the interactions of different perspectives as novels do, *The Female Reader* generates novelistic effects by means of the meticulous arrangement of its reading passages. In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin describes how novelistic discourse, as its "images" are "born in... [internally persuasive] soil," (348), provides the reader with a sense that she can complete the various "internally unresolved dialogues among characters (seen as embodied points of view) and between the author himself and his characters" (348-49). In contrast to "authoritative discourses" comprised of

"images of official-authoritative truth, images of virtue (of any sort: monastic, spiritual, bureaucratic, moral, etc.)" (344), novelistic discourse lends itself to private reading specifically because it can become the site of one's own "struggle" for "individual consciousness" (345). *The Female Reader* may allow for "struggle" or the development of "individual consciousness" as its reading passages are arranged in such a way that a variety of (mostly well-known) writers seem to be 'in conversation,' and the different selections 'speak to' one another on various subjects. Oftentimes an excerpt of what would otherwise seem to be "authoritative discourse" is directly contradicted, or appropriated and discussed in a different way by an excerpt from another text. In this way, readers are asked to distinguish between "internally persuasive discourse and authoritarian enforced discourses that do not matter to us, that do not touch us." (Bakhtin, "Novel" 345). Given the discursive possibilities of this genre, Wollstonecraft compiled a *Female Reader* that tempts readers to extend their own authority—to question or apply a subject or idea into "new contexts that dialogize it" or to make it theirs (Bakhtin, "Novel" 345-46).

Writing under the pseudonym "Mr. Cresswick, Teacher of Elocution"<sup>17</sup> Wollstonecraft situates her project in relation to an

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<sup>17</sup> In their prefatory note on the text, Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler suggest that *The Female Reader* was attributed to Wollstonecraft in Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798), and that Mr. Cresswick "a popular writer of conduct books...was almost certainly an acquaintance of Wollstonecraft through her publisher, Joseph Johnson" (54). I am dubious about Mr. Cresswick's

already established, traditionally masculine form of education, suggesting that her *Reader* is modeled after Enfield's *Speaker* and that the text includes reading passages in prose and poetry (divided into conventional categories such as "Narrative Pieces," "Moral and Didactic Pieces," etc.). She also emphasizes the feminine-appropriate nature of the text, remarking in the title page as well as the preface that it is "for the improvement of young women." However, Wollstonecraft's *Reader* might be more accurately designated as an *appropriation* of Enfield's elocutionary framework than an adaptation or 'feminine appropriate' version of his *Speaker*. *The Female Reader* adopts Enfield's overarching organizational structure, and the paratext surrounding *The Female Reader* (i.e., the title page and the initial nod to Enfield in the Preface) serves to camouflage the unconventional aspects of the text. Its pedagogical project, however, ultimately defines quite differently than *The Speaker's*, omitting the necessary apparatus to model how to read the passages appropriately. And, after remarking on the significance of Enfield's work, Wollstonecraft goes on to "subordinat[e]" the study of elocution to another pedagogical project. She writes:

The main object of this work is to imprint some useful

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"popularity" as a conduct book writer, as I have not encountered any such writing by him (or her?) in the course of my study of 18<sup>th</sup> century didactic texts. However, he/she does seem to have authored another elocutionary textbook (noted above) entitled *The Lady's Preceptor; or, a Series of Instructive and Pleasing Exercises in Reading; for the Particular use of Females; Consisting of a Selection of Moral Essays, Narratives, Letters* (1792). While the text bears little resemblance to *The Female Reader* in terms of pedagogical project, one Worldcat citation actually names Wollstonecraft as the author.

lessons on the mind, and cultivate the taste at the same time—to infuse a relish for a pure and simple style, by presenting natural and touching descriptions from the Scriptures, Shakespeare, &c.[...]Females are not educated to become public speakers or players; though many young ladies are now led by fashion to exhibit their persons on a stage, sacrificing to mere vanity that diffidence and reserve which characterizes youth, and is the most graceful ornament of the sex.

But if it be allowed to be a breach of modesty for a woman to obtrude her person or talents on the public when necessity does not justify and spur her on, yet to be able to read with propriety is certainly a very desirable attainment...It would be needless to repeat here the trite remark which proves an undeniable fact—that the ignorant never read with propriety; and they must ever be accounted ignorant who are suddenly made wise by the experience of others, never brought to a test by their own feeble unexercised reason. (iv-v)

Wollstonecraft's emphases on the importance of "cultivat[ing] the taste," "a relish for pure and simple style," and "read[ing] with propriety"<sup>18</sup> marks her indebtedness to Hugh Blair's often quoted

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<sup>18</sup> For a comprehensive study of the ways in which Blair's *Lectures* was "copied, redacted, quoted, and silently paraphrased" in other didactic contexts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century U.S., see "Reproducing Rhetorics" in Carr, Carr, and Schultz's *Archives of Instruction*.



*Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), and like her reference to Enfield, situate *The Female Reader* within a well-established and acceptable mode of didactic discourse. However, Wollstonecraft defines her project apart from this conventional approach, as she expresses her interest in "imprint[ing] lessons on the mind"—not as an auxiliary goal—but as the "main object" of the work, and her reference to the "feeble unexercised reason" of the "ignorant" alludes to the "strength of mind" she later talks of cultivating in *Vindication*. Although Wollstonecraft discusses some of the standards of voice training, such as "observing stops," she departs from Enfield in her appeal to a classical form of imitation-based writing pedagogy as a means of enabling young women to "form the judgment" and "write correctly." Through the elaboration of this pedagogical approach, Wollstonecraft marks her primary focus as the development of readers' "understanding:"

In the beginning only prevent their acquiring bad habits; instruct them in the common methods of observing stops and articulating each syllable; and as the mind is stored with arranged knowledge they will insensibly read well, interested in the sentiments they understand...When a girl arrives at a more advanced age it would still be more useful to make her read a short lesson, and then transcribe it from her memory; and afterwards let her copy the original, and lead her to remark on the mistakes she has made. This method

will exercise the memory and form the judgment at the same time: she would learn to write correctly, and retain the precepts which in some measure composed herself, and a kind of emulation would be excited from which no bad consequences could possibly follow. If this employment is allowed to occupy two mornings every week, at the end of four or five years the understanding will have received great strength, and the pupil will express herself both in speaking and writing, provided she has tolerable capacity, with a degree of propriety that will astonish those that have not adopted the same plan. (vi, xii-xiii)

Disregarding the conventional emphases on voice training, Wollstonecraft instead calls readers' attention to *reading transcribing, copying, remarking on the mistakes she has made*, suggesting that these "method[s]" will "exercise the memory." As such, her pedagogical project for *The Female Reader* is allied with the kind of female education that she proposes in *Vindication*—an education that will ultimately infuse a woman's "understanding" with "great strength." Thus, *The Female Reader* marks its larger conceptual departure from Enfield, appropriating *The Speaker's* structural design (a preface followed by anthology of organized reading passages) for the purposes of establishing a feminist pedagogical project.

*The Female Reader's* appropriation of *The Speaker's* structure is more elaborate, however, than the preface indicates,

as Wollstonecraft arranges the reading passages in a way that might allow for the development of readers' "judgment" and "understanding" as well. The first sixteen pages of *The Female Reader* are devoted to a section entitled "Select Desultory Thoughts," which includes 66 short passages excerpted from the work of contemporary authors and periodicals, about one quarter of which are written by established female authors (Hester Chapone, Wollstonecraft herself, and Madame de Genlis) and another quarter of which are comprised of excerpts from the works of Dr. John Gregory<sup>19</sup> and Swiss philosopher and minister Johann Kaspar Lavater.<sup>20</sup> Sections including brief, 1-3 sentence reading passages were commonly included in elocutionary readers as a 'warm up' before commencing the longer exercises; the conventional heading for this type of section was "Select Sentences," and the exercises were generally coupled with some type of didactic apparatus to indicate how to read the sentences (sometimes, for example, accent marks above each word). Wollstonecraft does not incorporate an elocutionary apparatus to guide the reading of "Thoughts," and the designation of the

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<sup>19</sup> Like critics and historians of today, Wollstonecraft also saw Gregory's *Legacy* as the epitome of useless, accomplishment-based education for women (see excerpt from *Vindication* above). Her later criticism of his work leads one to question her intentions in including him in *The Female Reader*.

<sup>20</sup> The fact that Wollstonecraft draws a large percentage of the excerpts in "Thoughts" from the work of women writers could also be argued as a way in which she challenges normative moral and domestic educational standard for women. Wollstonecraft, Chapone, and Genlis may be considered paradigms of the type of education Wollstonecraft hopes to promote, as they were all professional writers, working outside the accepted bounds of feminine "accomplishments."

section as a set of "Thoughts" rather than "Sentences" serves to emphasize cognition over rote repetition of syntactical constructs, thus underscoring Wollstonecraft's larger project of "imprint[ing] some useful lessons on the mind." Her use of the term "Desultory," seems to belie (and perhaps camouflage) her efforts to "carefully dispose" subjects "in a series that tends to make them illustrate each other" (iv). Even in these short passages, Wollstonecraft "links" "the detached pieces" in such a way that writers of divergent opinions engage 'in conversation with' one another regarding similar subjects.

The possibility for 'conversation' exists in other elocutionary readers for women that succeeded *The Female Reader* (see footnote 16) since 'feminine appropriate' reading material was relatively limited and therefore excerpts on similar subjects were often juxtaposed; however, Wollstonecraft's suggestion that she has arranged the passages beyond the broader categories that she appropriates from Enfield "to make them illustrate each other" signals her departure from elocutionary pedagogy, which, at this point, was not overtly concerned with cultivating the mental faculties beyond the capacity for rote memorization. The 'conversation' Wollstonecraft's careful arrangement generates suggests that authoritative discourse may be questioned, put into dialogue with other discourses, either resisted or made one's own (Bakhtin, "Novel" 345-346), ultimately allowing the "understanding" to achieve "great strength."

The first short reading passage that Wollstonecraft

includes is one from Dr. Gregory's philosophical treatise *A Comparative View of the State and Faculties of Mankind* (1765):<sup>21</sup>

"As the two sexes have very different parts to act in life nature has marked their characters very differently, in a way that best qualifies them to fulfill their respective duties in society" (1). Following what would have been, given Gregory's status as an expert on women's education at this time, a very authoritative tidbit regarding the "natural" state of sexual difference, Wollstonecraft has included a piece by "Mrs. Chapone." While Chapone's advice in *Letters* would seem to reinforce Dr. Gregory's statement regarding the sexes "fulfill[ing] respective duties in society," Wollstonecraft's choice of quotation—when isolated from the larger context of *Letters*—actually seems to implicitly call it into question. The following excerpt points to the fallibility of the present state of sexual difference:

Whilst men are proud of power, of wealth, dignity, learning, or abilities, young women are usually ambitious of nothing more than to be admired for their persons, their dress, or their most trivial accomplishments. The homage of men is their grand object: but they only desire them to be in love with their persons, careless how despicable their minds

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<sup>21</sup> Dr. John Gregory was a well-respected moral philosopher and physician. For more information regarding his interesting (albeit unorthodox) contribution to the medical field, see Robert Baker and Laurence McCullough's "[Medical Ethics' Appropriation of Moral Philosophy: The Case of the Sympathetic and the Unsympathetic Physician](#)" in *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* (Volume 17, Number 1, March 2007, 3-22).

appear, even to those their pretended adorers. (1)

On its own, Chapone's acerbic criticism of the female character adheres to conventions of traditional moral didactic discourse for women. Women's overindulgence in their physical characteristics, or their "persons" was a common topic of late 18<sup>th</sup> century writers. However, the juxtaposition of Chapone's statement with Gregory's seems to position him as her addressee, altering her discourse from moral didactic (with a group of young women as her audience) to polemic (with another well known writer on women's education as her audience). Although Chapone does not contradict Gregory's assertion that "the two sexes have very different parts to act in life," she seems to qualify this statement and make it "hers," emphasizing the fact that this "natural" expectation that each sex should "fulfil their respective duties in society" (Gregory) has left women with mere "trivial accomplishments" in contrast to men's "power,...wealth, dignity, learning, [and] abilities." The fact that a female appears to be questioning and appropriating Gregory's authoritative masculine discourse in order to make her own, rather perceptive point invites the reader to engage in the conversation as well—to determine whose perception of sexual difference is a more accurate one.

After the rather officious statement by Mrs. Chapone, we encounter a quote from Johann Kaspar Lavater, a Swiss writer admired by Wollstonecraft (Todd 192) who worked with Goethe on *Essays on Physiognomy* (1789-98). Wollstonecraft does not quote

him in the anthology section of *The Female Reader* (or "Books"), but she includes him in "Select Desultory Thoughts" in 16 out of 66 entries, as his *Aphorisms on Man* (1788) provides a variety of short adages to include in this segment.<sup>22</sup> His short and ostensibly innocuous comment "All finery is a sign of littleness" (1), like Chapone's, seems a familiar example of the traditional moral discourse offered to young ladies at this time. However, his point echoes Chapone's statement regarding women's ambition "to be admired for their persons, their dress, or their most trivial accomplishments" above all else. Lavater's perception of "finery" as demonstrative of "littleness" seems to reinforce Chapone's criticism concerning women's attempt to attain "the homage of men" by superficially focusing on their "persons" or "dress," and consequently failing to take the condition of "their minds" into account. In his apparent agreement with Chapone, Lavater assumes the position of distinguished male author expressing solidarity with a woman—one who has called into question Dr. Gregory's perspective on the role of womanhood. Therefore, readers may engage with the positions of these three interlocutors—whether one sees them as an expert on women's education who has just received his comeuppance, a Bluestocking with an incisive intellect, and a philosopher who agrees with the Bluestocking, or simply a man challenged by a woman who is

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<sup>22</sup> Wollstonecraft provides the names of most authors included in *The Female Reader* but usually excludes the names of the original texts from which excerpts are derived. To locate original source texts, see Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler's annotated version of *The Female Reader* in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, Vol. 4 (William Pickering, 1989).

'backed up' by a man, one is nevertheless invited to question and complete this clearly unconventional exchange.

"Select Desultory Thoughts" features many 'conversations' amongst distinguished interlocutors, each addressing a different topic. Gregory, Wollstonecraft (signed 'O') and Madame de Genlis (French educationist) share ideas concerning proper interaction with servants on pages 4-5. From there, subjects range from "decency" to "charity" to overeating to thinking for oneself. Gregory, Chapone, Lavater, and Genlis are at the forefront, while occasionally (particularly towards the end) Wollstonecraft includes excerpts from four different popular journals: *Clio*, *Seed*, *Connoisseur*, and *Spectator* (Ferguson xx), two from Proverbs, one excerpt from Young, one from Swift, and finally one from Hugh Blair. Female interlocutors are unavoidable, as Wollstonecraft, Genlis, and Chapone together contribute 25 of the 66 entries. Wollstonecraft integrates the women's 25 entries throughout "Thoughts," making certain that no discussion is lacking in a woman's perspective. Considering the subjects that these selections address, none of them in and of themselves would appear to challenge traditional moral educational standards for women. However, Wollstonecraft's textual arrangement of the passages into clusters of specific subjects puts them 'in conversation' with one another; therefore, "Thoughts" may be seen as a forum in which varying interlocutors—four educators, one philosopher, two professional writers, a rhetorician, four current periodicals, the Bible—regardless of sex, can converse



and contradict, therefore enabling readers to question and appropriate the conversation at hand into their own "internally persuasive" discourse.

These 'conversations' take place throughout *The Female Reader*. The majority of reading passages, like those in "Select Desultory Thoughts," are comprised of excerpts from contemporary writers and periodicals, about a quarter of which are written by women. Under this larger heading of "Moral and Didactic Pieces," Wollstonecraft has loosely arranged the 38 passages according to subject matter. For instance, readings 16-19 are titled "On the Government of the Temper," "On Obedience," "On Humility," and "On Politeness" -all devoted to some aspect of behavior, and are distinguishable from the preceding group of six devoted to female "Employment," and the following group of 3 devoted to "Sensibility" and "Sentiment." One such group of readings is dedicated to "Dress." Although ostensibly a very appropriate subject of discussion according to conventional moral standards for women's education, the conversation that ensues renders such an assumption questionable.

Once again, Gregory is excerpted as 'the authority' on women's education, and his masculine authoritative discourse seems impervious to inquiry, as he states

Do not confine your attention to dress to your public appearances. Accustom yourselves to habitual neatness, so that in the most careless undress, in your most unguarded hours, you may have no reason to be ashamed

of your appearance. You will not easily believe how much we consider your dress as expressive of your characters. Vanity, levity, slovenliness, folly, appear through it. An elegant simplicity is an equal proof of taste and delicacy. (64)

Here, Gregory emphasizes the importance of dress as indicative of a woman's "character," and therefore suggests that women should not only provide ample "attention to dress" for the purpose of "public appearance," but should also make sure to maintain "habitual neatness" at all times. He then refers to the need for women to adhere to a common ideal of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century reinforced by various writers on the subject of women's conduct and behavior of the time—"elegant simplicity." The somewhat undefined achievements of "taste and delicacy" are also emphasized, and it is left to the young lady's own discretion to determine exactly how to accomplish and maintain these standards. Perhaps a bit befuddled, readers will next encounter a passage on "The Same Subject" signed "M. Wollstonecraft" (from *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787)).<sup>23</sup> Despite Gregory's uncompromising position, the presence of another interlocutor immediately invites readers to question the implications of the dialogue, as Gregory's authoritative discourse appears to be appropriated and expanded upon by Wollstonecraft:

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<sup>23</sup> With the exception of this instance, all of Wollstonecraft's original work that appears in *The Female Reader* is marked either as "Original Stories" to indicate that a passage is excerpted from this earlier work, or simply "O". (In this case, excerpts come from *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, perhaps signed "O" to signify 'original.')

By far too much of a girl's time is taken up in dress. This is an exterior accomplishment; but I chose to consider it by itself. The body hides the mind, and it is in its turn obscured by the drapery. I hate to see the frame of a picture so glaring as to catch the eye and divide the attention: dress ought to adorn the person, and not to rival it. It may be simple, elegant, and becoming, without being expensive; and ridiculous fashions disregarded, while singularity is avoided. The beauty of dress (I shall raise astonishment by saying so) is its not being conspicuous in one way or another; when it neither distorts or hides the human form by any unnatural protuberances. If ornaments are much studied a consciousness of being well dressed will appear in the face; and surely this mean pride does not give much sublimity to it. 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.' And how much conversation does dress furnish which surely cannot be very improving or entertaining. (64)

In and of itself, Wollstonecraft's passage would not 'raise the eyebrow' of a strict moralist—her emphases on dressing so as to be "simple, elegant, and becoming" are standard expectations (see Gregory's), and given her history as an educator, she is perhaps addressing a group of young bourgeois women who cannot afford to indulge in "expensive" "drapery" or "ornaments" and therefore

must rely on the appearance of their "mind[s]" instead. However, juxtaposed in 'conversation' with Gregory, Wollstonecraft directly contradicts his masculine authoritative notion that "Dress" should be underscored as an important feminine accomplishment. Whereas he suggests that attention to dress should be an "habitual" activity, Wollstonecraft calls attention to the fact that "too much of a girl's time is taken up in dress." His assertion that dress is "expressive of your characters," coupled with his lack of practical guidance in the matter of dressing with "elegant simplicity," implies that poor dress is in some way inextricably tied to poor character, as he states that "[v]anity, levity, slovenliness, folly, appear through it." This linking of feminine character to outward appearance is challenged by Wollstonecraft's presentation of "simpl[icity]" and "elegan[ce]" in dress as qualities that can be achieved through proper and practical choices, as she reminds young ladies that "dress ought to adorn the person, not rival it," and that one should avoid dress that is too "expensive" or "distorts or hides the human form by unnatural protuberances." She also challenges this notion that dress is an accurate representation of one's inner self by asserting that "The body hides the mind, and it is in its turn obscured by the drapery." Clothing is not so much indicative of one's inner self, as it is capable of concealing it. She reinforces this point by including a quote from the New Testament Book of Matthew which reads "'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,'" to which she

adds "And how much conversation does dress furnish which surely cannot be very improving or entertaining." Here, she indicates that it is the appearance of the heart, not one's outfit, that should be the most important aspect of a woman's dress, and that paying too much attention to dress will affect one's ability to engage in "entertaining" conversation—that which is truly "expressive of [one's] character."

Ultimately, Wollstonecraft's assertion that "the mind" should not be "obscured" by "drapery," and a woman should dress in such a way as to let her "heart" be the focus of her admirers is a clear contradiction of Gregory's emphasis on dress as representative of feminine "character," and therefore an essential feminine accomplishment. Her contradiction of Gregory's seemingly inadequate discussion of the subject invites readers to complete the dialogue—perhaps to question the validity of masculine authoritative discourse. Regardless of whether or not readers knew who "M. Wollstonecraft" was, what is important is that Gregory has lost the argument once again, as Wollstonecraft appropriates moral didactic discourse for women and transforms it into something practical for a female audience interested in learning how to achieve the abstract ideal of "elegance."

However, Wollstonecraft gives a woman the last word in the conversation. As if to affirm Wollstonecraft's final statement regarding the lack of "improving or entertaining" "conversation"

involved in the subject of dress, "Mrs. Trimmer"<sup>24</sup> equally exposes the insignificance of the subject in the following excerpt entitled "Dress Subservient to Useful Purposes:"

Working for the poor is a species of charity which forms a part of the prerogative of our sex, and gives to those who have leisure for it an opportunity of doing much good with very little trouble and expense. Were it more generally practiced by young people it would moderate that inordinate love of dress, which renders many, who cannot afford to employ milliners and mantua-makers, literally slaves to fashion: they would be ashamed to covet such a variety of ornaments when they beheld what trifles gratify others of the same species with themselves (65).

On its own, Trimmer's statement would by no means be considered a challenge to masculine authoritative discourse—the suggestion that young ladies should engage in "charity" work is not uncommon in Evangelical tracts during this time. However, following Wollstonecraft's discussion, Trimmer seems to speak to Wollstonecraft's assertion that "far too much of a girl's time is taken up in dress," conveniently entering the conversation to offer "an opportunity of doing much good" that she hopes will

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<sup>24</sup> Author of the widely-circulating children's book *Fabulous Histories* (1786), Mrs. Sarah Trimmer was known as a proponent of the "Sunday School movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (Ward 177). Wollstonecraft also takes excerpts from Trimmer's *The Economy of Charity* (1787) which "was influential in promoting the establishment of Sunday Schools for poor children" (Ward 177).

"moderate that inordinate love of dress, which renders many...literally slaves to fashion." With her assertion that "they [young ladies] would be ashamed to covet such a variety of ornaments when they beheld what trifles gratify others," Trimmer simultaneously reinforces Wollstonecraft's statement that a woman's dress should not be "conspicuous" or "expensive," but also seems to chastise both Wollstonecraft and Gregory for dwelling on the subject, the "inordinate love of "which has already done much damage to the pocketbooks of many "slaves to fashion." Furthermore, how could one spend a moment longer contemplating such a trivial issue as a woman's dress when there are "others of the same species" who must be satisfied with mere "trifles"? Clearly, Trimmer offers another perspective on the subject of "Dress," complicating a young woman's capacity to "complete" the dialogue—should she buckle under Gregory's authoritative discourse which suggests that her reputation is on the line and spend all day and night trying to look "elegant"? Follow Wollstonecraft's guidelines to achieving a "simple" and "elegant" appearance, and let her "heart" speak rather than her clothes? Forget about dress altogether and spend her time doing charity work? This conversation has left readers with many questions to consider.

Throughout *The Female Reader*, the works of women writers are free to converse with and contradict those of men of any profession—philosopher, rhetorician, renowned author. In the later Books, six other women authors are introduced, all of whom

either wrote professionally or were part of the Bluestocking group<sup>25</sup> such as Elizabeth Carter (*Poems on Several Occasions* (1762)), Anna Laetitia Barbauld (*Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781)), and Charlotte Smith (*Elegaic Sonnets, and Other Essays* (1784)). Together, according to Moira Ferguson, women writers comprise about "one-third" of the "selections from contemporary eighteenth-century writers," and, Ferguson also explains that they are all "female-identified in varying ways" (xx). This selection of women authors agrees with, questions, and undermines the authority of other well known and respected male contributors, such as Shakespeare, Steele, and Swift. By implementing this unique organizational strategy, Wollstonecraft appropriates Enfield's didactic approach as a way of establishing a feminist project. Although it does not explicitly address the rights of woman, *The Female Reader* encourages young women to think for themselves, therefore fostering the kind of learning that *Vindication* promotes. *The Female Reader's* appropriation of elocutionary pedagogy calls into question the opposition between didacticism and feminism and invites us to reconsider the

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<sup>25</sup> In "Bluestocking Feminism," Harriet Guest describes the women of the Bluestocking group as "well-educated but not aristocratic women" who were "linked through correspondence as well as social interaction in London, Edinburgh, and perhaps Dublin, from around 1750 to the early decades of the nineteenth century" (60). Women in the Bluestocking group "spent much of their time socializing with men" and were generally "conservative" in their views regarding the improvement of women, since "their appearance as published authors was sanctioned by their reputation for conventional feminine skills" (59, 61). Their publications were "widely read and celebrated in the second half of the eighteenth century" (60). Some prominent Bluestocking women were Hester Chapone, Elizabeth Carter, Catherine Talbot, and Elizabeth Montagu (60). Chapone, Carter, and Talbot appear in *The Female Reader*.



possibilities that women's didactic writing might allow for feminist studies. The following chapter furthers this investigation into Wollstonecraft's appropriation of didactic texts and traditions by exploring the ways in which *Original Stories* (1788) and *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) manipulate masculine discourses to establish feminist projects as well.

### 3.0 ORIGINAL STORIES AND THOUGHTS ON THE EDUCATION OF DAUGHTERS: “REFASHIONING” ‘EXPERT’ ADVICE

Wollstonecraft’s appropriation of Enfield’s elocutionary framework enabled her to recontextualize established discourses on women’s “proper sphere,” thus encouraging readers to question these otherwise authoritative perspectives. However, Wollstonecraft’s appropriation of the work of didactic writers that specifically address women’s education is more complex, as she not only adapts didactic structures, but also works to revise these writers’ arguments regarding women’s education. While they specifically address this process in relation to 19<sup>th</sup> century literary texts, Carr, Carr, and Schultz describe the process by which compilers in various textbook traditions “reappropriated” and “refashioned” earlier rhetorics and provide a model for understanding how Wollstonecraft appropriated the didactic projects of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Émile* and Dr. John Gregory’s *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters*. They suggest that it was general practice for compilers of early rhetorics to simultaneously “amplify and narrow the effects and influence of earlier rhetorics, transforming more fully and diversely elaborated arguments into a few memorable positions...[and]

dispossess arguments from earlier authors, diminishing the distinctive stylistic or conceptual qualities that might identify them with a specific historical and theoretical position" (47). In *Original Stories*, Wollstonecraft enacts this process of reappropriation as she refashions Rousseau's representation of Sophy in *Émile*. Wollstonecraft's refashioning of Gregory's *Legacy* takes on the form of a more generalized response to his work, as she integrates sections into *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* that reflect those in *Legacy*, revising his perspective on female conduct, love, and marriage. Wollstonecraft's "reappropriat[ion]" and "refashioning" of "older texts" can tell us a great deal about her attitudes regarding the improvement of women, as she further elaborates arguments from *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in her didactic texts.

Throughout *Vindication*, one of Wollstonecraft's primary goals is to refute leading male authors regarding the subject of women's education. Two whom she explicitly critiques are Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Dr. John Gregory: She suggests "I may be accused of arrogance; still I must declare what I firmly believe, that all the writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners from Rousseau to Dr. Gregory, have contributed to render women more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been; and, consequently, more useless members of society" (22). She offers more lengthy refutations in Chapter 5, entitled "Animadversions on Some Writers," in which she also provides some commentary on Dr.

Fordyce, another widely recognized authority on female education, and recognizes (and questions) the work of women writers who have also contributed to the improvement of women. However, despite Wollstonecraft's rejection of the principles established within Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774) and Rousseau's *Émile* (1762), she adopts certain aspects of Gregory's and Rousseau's didactic methodologies in her *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) and *Original Stories from Real life* (1788) while simultaneously rejecting other ideas that fail to adhere to her feminist pedagogical project.

### 3.1 REFASHIONING *ÉMILE*: REDEFINING THE TERMS OF FEMININE VIRTUE

In *Mary Wollstonecraft*, Moira Ferguson and Janet Todd remark on the similarity between the "general ideas" of *Original Stories* and Rousseau's *Émile*, making a quick reference to Wollstonecraft's "need to change the gender of the pupils" (322).<sup>26</sup> Although it is easy to find a move towards audience

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<sup>26</sup> There are actually some profound differences between the two texts. Rousseau's *Émile* is a treatise on education intended for men of intellect whereas Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories* (1788), which features fictional stories that teach practical lessons, is intended for both "teacher" and "pupil" to learn from and enjoy. Although Rousseau takes on an "imaginary pupil" (*Émile*), he does so, not for the purposes of connecting with potential learners, but in order to reinforce "the rules which call for proof" or to show "how my theories may be put into practice" (18). Rousseau makes it clear that his regimen is not a practicum that should be adopted by parents, as he is

accommodation like "chang[ing] the gender of the pupils" insignificant, when taking into consideration the nature of didactic traditions, noticing even the seemingly insignificant or 'routine' alterations might lead to a better understanding of the ways in which Wollstonecraft appropriates Rousseau's educational project.<sup>27</sup> The similarity of "general ideas" is not surprising—that Wollstonecraft "amplifies" the notion that children should be raised, not by ignorant nurses but by capable parents or what Rousseau terms "good tutor[s]" is easily attributable to the fact that philosophers such as Rousseau and Locke (from whom Rousseau borrows many of his educational precepts) were recognized by many as leading educational theorists in 18<sup>th</sup> century thought. She also "narrows" this idea, as she spends no time explaining the reasons for which her tutor must 'rescue' these privileged children from the flawed upbringing of "ignorant" servants, whereas Rousseau devotes paragraphs to explaining why underlings should not be responsible for raising children of the upper-classes. Wollstonecraft also "dispossesses" Rousseau by adopting (without citing) the larger conceptual framework of *Émile*—that of

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noted as having responded in the following way to a man who suggested that he educated his son according to the precepts established in the book: "'Good Heavens! So much the worse for you, sir, and so much worse still for your son.'" (vii). Instead, *Émile* is "not so much a treatise on education as the visions of a dreamer with regard to education" (2).<sup>27</sup> In *Archives of Instruction*, Carr, Carr, and Schultz suggest that when characterizing a textbooks' project, it is important to consider that "what is important is often apparent in small, routine gestures...in ways not necessarily visible in a preface, table of contents, or index. Local details or variations—in, for example, a biographical headnote, the exercises a student is assigned to do, or a listing of the common tropes—can signal the changing interests of the larger project" (Carr, Carr, and Schultz 205).

developing a child's "judgment...by way of observation and experience" (vii) throughout the formative stages of life—and revising it to adhere to the expectations of a (young) female audience. In this process of "amplifying," "narrowing," and "dispossessing" Rousseau's discourse, Wollstonecraft, like other woman writers such as Sarah Fielding (*The Governess* 1749), Ann Murry (*Mentoria* (1778)) and Catharine Macaulay (*Letters on Education* (1790)), adapts the figure of the wise mentor in service of her own pedagogical project.<sup>28</sup>

Rousseau's project in tutoring Émile, although ostensibly student-centered, is actually more of an opportunity for Rousseau (in accordance with enlightenment principles) to demonstrate the superiority of the "natural man."<sup>29</sup> Rousseau's "imaginary pupil," through whom he plans to demonstrate "how [his] theories [regarding education] may be put into practice" (18), is obliged to undergo a method of childrearing that is in "harmony with...

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<sup>28</sup> *Original Stories* is actually part of two larger didactic traditions—the 'woman as pedagogue' tradition, and the rational moralist tradition—which I will address at length in Chapters IV and V. Here, I am concerned with her relationship to Rousseau, which I will take up again in Chapter IV as part of my discussion of the rational moralists in children's literature, for whom Rousseau was an important influence.

<sup>29</sup> A preoccupation of other enlightenment philosophers such as John Locke and Thomas Hobbes, the idea of man in a 'state of nature' involved imagining how he would have developed without having to conform to the strictures of civilized society. Rousseau explains his conception of Nature (and thus the natural) in the following way: "We are born sensitive and from our birth onwards we are affected in various ways by our environment. As soon as we become conscious of our sensations we tend to seek or shun the things that cause them, at first because they are pleasant or unpleasant, then because they suit us or not, and at last because of judgments formed by means of the ideas of happiness and goodness which reason gives us. These tendencies gain strength and permanence with the growth of reason, but hindered by our habits they are more or less warped by our prejudices. Before this change they are what I call Nature within us" (7).

natural tendencies" (7), which involves "maternal feeding, bodily freedom..., physical training..., development of the senses, exercise of the judgment through sensory experience and contact with things, [and] the approach to abstract knowledge by way of observation and experience" (vii). Having been tutored thus from "birth to manhood," appealing to the enlightenment belief that "man should [not] be alone," Rousseau suggests in the final book that "Emile is now a man, and we must give him his promised helpmeet. That helpmeet is Sophy" (321).<sup>30</sup> Although it has taken 320 pages to adequately educate the "natural man," Rousseau excuses himself from the task of educating the "natural woman" in the following way:

...women are always exclaiming that we educated them for nothing but vanity and coquetry, that we keep them amused with trifles that we may be their masters; we are responsible, so they say, for the faults we attribute to them. How Silly! What have men to do with

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<sup>30</sup> Rousseau's idea of the "helpmeet" seems to have influenced both Wollstonecraft and her daughter, Mary Shelley. Shelley's famous novel *Frankenstein* (1818), a social commentary in which she "provokes attention to the differences that were fracturing modern [revolutionary] society—the view of political radicals as monsters; the class differences that made the poor seem monstrous...the racial differences that made African slaves seem subhuman to those profiting from the slave trade" (Damrosch et al. 811), depicts a very different monster than one might encounter in sensationalized 20<sup>th</sup> century versions. In Chapter 17, a hitherto compassionate "monster" driven to "fiendish rage" by man's cruelty and indifference, demands that his estranged creator "create a female for me" to ease his loneliness, much like Rousseau's assertion that Émile should have a "helpmeet" so that he might not be "alone." Like Wollstonecraft, however, Shelley revises Rousseau's idea, representing woman as having the capacity to improve man, as the monster requests a "female" so that his "evil passions" might be quelled, whereas Rousseau suggests that woman functions merely to "please" man and "stimulate[] man's passions" (323).

the education of girls? What is to hinder their mothers educating them as they please? There are no colleges for girls: so much the better for them!...Who is it that compels a girl to waste her time on foolish trifles? Are they forced, against their will, to spend half their time over the toilet, following the example set them by you? (327)

Despite Rousseau's clear refusal (on the part of mankind) to accept responsibility for "the education of girls," he has a very specific understanding of Sophy's function according to "the physical and moral order" (321). Although exercising influence over man as a result of her ability to "stimulate[] man's passions," Sophy's primary goal is "to be pleasing in his sight, to win his respect and love, to train him in childhood, to tend him in manhood, to counsel and console, to make his life pleasant and happy" Ultimately, Rousseau explains, "these are the duties of woman for all time, and this is what she should be taught while she is young" (328). It is this depiction of "Sophy," Émile's "helpmeet" who should be (by nature) "weak and passive," that Wollstonecraft "reappropriates" in her writing of *Original Stories*.

In "Pedagogy as Self Expression in Mary Wollstonecraft: Exorcising the Past, Finding a Voice," Mitzi Myers discusses Wollstonecraft's appropriation of Rousseau's male mentor, suggesting that Wollstonecraft "convert[s] another mutating genre—children's literature—into a woman's form, displacing the



male tutors of Rousseau and Thomas Day with her female mentoria" (201). In so doing, the *Original Stories* demonstrate "...how women can school themselves toward self-command and psychic self-sufficiency" (201-203). However, Wollstonecraft's appropriation of the "male tutor" also serves to undermine established masculine discourse regarding feminine duty, as she "refashions" Rousseau's idea of Sophy as slavish dependant, who was made "to please and be in subjection to man" (322). She recasts his tutor as a female figure who is uninterested in the "foolish trifles" that Rousseau suggests are the primary occupation of the female sex, relying instead on "reason" to guide her judgment. Wollstonecraft's mentoria, Mrs. Mason, educates two recently orphaned upper-class girls (Mary and Caroline) through various experiences with "real life," as well as stories that correspond to and illustrate the consequences of the girls' various faults. To facilitate this approach, Wollstonecraft divides the twenty-five chapters by lesson (for example, the first three chapters are devoted to "The Treatment of Animals," with subsequent chapters dealing with issues of "Anger," "Lying," "Dress," "Prayer," "Charity" etc.(362-65). As Myers suggests, the very existence of Mrs. Mason, who takes on the responsibility of "mother-teacher," would undermine Rousseau's suggestion that Sophy "cannot fulfil her purpose without [man's] aid, without his goodwill, without his respect," as her pupils strive-not to please man-but to please Mrs. Mason. However, Wollstonecraft's refashioning of Rousseau's natural woman moves beyond her

recasting of the male mentor as "mother-teacher." Incorporating the various manifestations of Sophy's "feminine virtues"—coquetry, cunning, and utter dependence upon man—Wollstonecraft recasts Sophy, not as the "natural woman," but as an "irrational monster" who, in the absence of man, can access neither Reason nor God.

In *Vindication* Wollstonecraft refutes Rousseau's description of woman as possessing "natural" propensities towards certain characteristics, such as cunning and coquetry. Wollstonecraft's attack on Rousseau's position concerning women's role in society in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* allows her to appropriate his notion of virtue in accordance with her feminist project; however, *Original Stories* extends the work of *Vindication* by further redefining Rousseau's notion of virtue, suggesting that women should strive to please God rather than man. For instance, Rousseau makes the following claim (using a hypothetical example) regarding the female sex, despite the fact that, as Wollstonecraft suggests in *Vindication*, he has had very little experience observing them:

Here is a little girl busy all day with her doll; she is always changing its clothes, dressing and undressing it...We have here a very early and clearly-marked bent; you have only to follow it and train it. What the little girl most clearly desires is to dress her doll, to make its bows, its tippets, its sashes, and its tuckers; she is dependent on other people's

kindness in all this, and it would be much pleasanter to be able to do it herself. Here is a motive for her earliest lessons, they are not tasks prescribed, but favours bestowed. Little girls always dislike learning to read and write, but they are always ready to learn to sew. They think they are grown up, and in imagination they are using their knowledge for their own adornment. (331)

What Rousseau advocates for Sophy is an education according to nature—what she seems to “desire” is what her mother should encourage and cultivate in her. A clever justification for the subjugation of women, Rousseau appeals to the sovereignty of nature to maintain that women delight in trifles and therefore should not be exposed to more rigorous subjects such as reading and writing. Claiming that the adherence to what nature intended is the mark of woman’s virtue (as it is in men), Rousseau establishes a different set of virtues for both sexes, based on the belief that “The Most High...has endowed man with boundless passions, together with a law to guide them, so that man may be alike free and self-controlled...endowed with reason by which to control them. Woman is also endowed with boundless passion; God has given her [only] modesty to restrain them” (323), leading to the necessity that woman “be at the mercy of man’s judgment” (328).

*Original Stories* illustrates the consequences of educating according to one’s natural “bent” by refashioning the character

of Sophy into the young "Jane Fretful."<sup>31</sup> Jane's emergence is prompted by a dispute between Mary and Caroline, which becomes so vehement that a young bird that the girls were caring for is trampled in the process. Mrs. Mason then invokes the following story to illustrate the result of being governed by one's "passion:"

Jane Fretful was an only child. Her fond, weak mother would not allow her to be contradicted on any occasion. The child had some tenderness of heart; but so accustomed was she to see every thing give way to her humour, that she imagined the world was only made for her...A lady, who visited her mother, brought with her one day a pretty little dog. Jane was delighted with it; and the lady, with great reluctance, parted with it to oblige her friend. For some time she fondled, and really felt something like affection for it: but one day it happened to snatch a cake she was going to eat, and though there were twenty within reach, she flew into a violent passion, and threw a stool at the poor creature...and the poor wretch

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<sup>31</sup> *Original Stories'* deployment of the exemplary 'everywoman' character (e.g. Jane Fretful, Lady Sly, Mrs. Trueman) marks its relationship to larger didactic traditions linked to Sarah Fielding's educational novel *The Governess* (1749) and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678, 1684), which I will discuss at length in Chapters IV and V. It is important to note that *Original Stories'* exemplary everywoman characters were not given names to reflect their particular virtues or faults until the third edition (in the first two editions Jane Fretful was "Jane B", Lady Sly was "Lady L." and so forth). The edition I am working with is the third (1796), which also features illustrations by William Blake.

languished two days, suffering the most excruciating  
torture. (381)

This little anecdote demonstrates that if allowed to pursue her natural "bent," woman will not, as Rousseau suggests, use her God-given "modesty" to "restrain" her "passion" (323). Rousseau argues that even "the tiniest little girls" are "controlled by 'What will people think of you?'" (329), and therefore require little education beyond "their conduct, their manners, [and] their behaviour" in public (325); *Original Stories* instead emphasizes that she will allow "every thing to give way to her humour," causing suffering even for those she supposedly feels "affection" for. Incorporating the image of a "pretty little dog" as opposed to another human being, *Original Stories* dramatizes the extent to which "violent passion" can lead one to exercise "lawless power" (*Vindication* 44) upon creatures considered to be less capable of reason, much as Mary and Caroline's passion destroyed their little pet. Wollstonecraft goes on to describe the quality of life that a child permitted to indulge her passion will experience, suggesting that "...anger soon distorted her regular features, and gave a forbidding fierceness to her eyes...She had not, by doing good, prepared her soul for another state, or cherished any hopes that could disarm death of its terrors, or render that last sleep sweet—its approach was dreadful!" (382). Describing the embittered state of Jane Fretful's life, in which even her "features" were eventually "distorted" by "anger," *Original Stories* rejects Rousseau's logic

that a woman's virtue can be defined by the extent to which she learns to "please and to be in subjection to man," revealing that a much more serious educational regimen is required to address women's faults. More importantly, *Original Stories* exposes the absurdity of "virtue" as being relative according to sex, since Jane Fretful might ultimately become quite good at 'pleasing men' through feminine arts *despite* her propensity for rage and violence, but she certainly could not be called virtuous by any standard. *Original Stories* indicates that a woman of real virtue is subject only to God, and it is by "doing good," not by "pleasing" men, that woman might "prepar[e] her soul for another state" (382). Therefore, reappropriating Rousseau's character of Sophy into the "real life" story of Jane Fretful, *Original Stories* emphasizes that it is in the acquisition of this type of virtue—not through Rousseau's version—that one maintains "her reputation and her good name" (Rousseau 325), since Jane Fretful's "marks of convulsive anger...followed her to the grave, on which no one shed a tear. She was soon forgotten; and I only remember her, to warn you to shun her errors" (Wollstonecraft 382).

Rousseau's emphasis on modesty as one of the feminine virtues, that which he suggests will ultimately restrain woman's "passions," is allied to another feminine "virtue" that Wollstonecraft attacks in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, that of coquetry. For Rousseau, modesty is understood to restrain the passions by obliging a woman—not actually to dispel the

passion—but “to conceal [her] desires” (349) from public notice. The practice of coquetry arises out of necessity, which Rousseau describes as “one of the distinctive characters of the sex. Self-possession, penetration, delicate observation, this is a woman’s science; the skill to make use of it is her chief accomplishment” (348). This “science” enables a woman to get what she wants despite the modesty that prohibits her from explicitly requesting it. In *Vindication*, coquetry is a form of falsehood that camouflages and indulges the passions rather than allowing “reason [to] teach passion to submit to necessity; or... the dignified pursuit of virtue and knowledge [to] raise the mind above those emotions which rather imbitter than sweeten the cup of life, when they are not restrained within due bounds” (31). Whereas *Vindication*’s attack on Rousseau only alludes to the ways life may be “imbitter[ed]” by engaging in coquetry, *Original Stories* reappropriates the figure of Sophy to reveal its detrimental effects, demonstrating how one might instead “attend strictly to truth” in order to maintain a relationship with “the Author of good, the Fountain of truth” (384).

In *Émile*, Rousseau suggests that “it is said that women are false. They become false. They are really endowed with skill not duplicity; in the genuine inclinations of their sex they are not false even when they tell a lie...The more modest a woman is, the more art she needs, even with her husband. Yes, I maintain that coquetry, kept within bounds, becomes modest and true” (348). If encouraged to perfect this art, Rousseau maintains that Sophy

will have a better chance of actualizing her "legitimate desires" by "indicating her inclinations without open expression" (348). Wollstonecraft's character of Lady Sly has also adopted the "science" of coquetry, and she has learned to manipulate this supposed virtue to engage in falsehoods that gratify her far beyond any "legitimate" desires.

This woman has a little soul, she never attended to truth, and obtaining great part of her fortune by falsehood, it has blighted all of her enjoyments. She inhabits that superb house, wears the gayest clothes, and rides in that beautiful carriage without feeling pleasure. Suspicion, and the cares it has given birth to, have wrinkled her countenance, and banished every trace of beauty, which paint endeavors in vain to repair...She imagines that every person she converses with means to deceive her; and when she leaves a company, supposes all they ill they may say of her, because she recollects her own practice...She cannot pray to God—He hates a liar! (385)

This story is prompted by a lie that Mary and Caroline tell Mrs. Mason, and it serves to illustrate what the embittering effects of coquetry might involve. Not only is this woman unable to enjoy any of her finery as it was attained through "falsehood," but she is also haunted by "suspicion" that others are as false as she is. Once again, *Original Stories* establishes God, not man, as the ultimate judge of feminine virtue, indicating that Lady Sly



"cannot pray to God" since "the Searcher of hearts reads your very thoughts; [so] that nothing is hid from him" (383), and that even "[t]ones of voice, motions of the hand or head, if they make another believe what they ought not to believe, are lies, and of the worst kind; because the contrivance aggravates the guilt" (383). In so doing, *Original Stories* refutes Rousseau's claim that "coquetry, kept within bounds, becomes modest and true," since, in the absence of man, there is no way of maintaining these "bounds." Like Jane Fretful, Lady Sly escaped the discerning "judgment" of the men in her life, learning the art of coquetry at a young age. Her penchant for falsehood began as a mere entertainment, as she "used to say pert things, which the injudicious people about her laughed at, and called very witty. Finding that her prattle pleased, she talked incessantly, and invented stories, when adding to those that had some foundation was not sufficient to entertain the company" (386). *Original Stories* demonstrates the dangers of Rousseau's understanding of feminine virtue by redefining the term in relation to God's judgment rather than man's. Although the art of coquetry allows for the fulfillment of women's "needs" in this life (depending on her husband's goodwill, of course), *Original Stories* reminds readers that, in pursuing "trifling gratification" they run the risk of "wantonly forfeit[ing] the favour of Him, from whom you have received life and all its blessings" (383). Rousseau and his fellow men may disapprove of a woman of "frankness and

uprightness," but God—as *Original Stories* emphasizes—"hates a liar!" (385).

Other manifestations of Sophy emerge throughout *Original Stories*; she appears as a young woman who obsesses about her appearance, a negligent woman named Mrs. Dowdy, and even in the oftentimes self-indulgent behavior of the two young orphans, Mary and Caroline, whose passions lead them to such faults as affecting airs and overeating. Regardless of the circumstance, Sophy's character is always improved by virtue, which Wollstonecraft describes, finally, in relation to the worthy character, Mrs. Trueman, who "loves truth, and [] is ever exercising benevolence and love. From the insect, that she avoids treading on, her affection may be traced to that Being who lives for ever. And it is from her goodness her agreeable qualities spring" (436). Ultimately, by refashioning Rousseau within the didactic tradition, *Original Stories* allows for the redefinition of masculine discourse concerning "feminine virtue" as a female-centered rationale for pleasing God rather than man.

### 3.2 REFASHIONING A *LEGACY*: REDEFINING THE RULES OF CONDUCT

Wollstonecraft's *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) also redefines masculine discourses by addressing expectations of female conduct and the institutions of love and marriage as characterized by Dr. John Gregory. Gregory was not the only authority on women's education to address female conduct, love, and marriage, but he does so thoroughly, devoting an entire section to each subject. Wollstonecraft acknowledges the influence of Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774) in *Vindication*, suggesting that "I cannot silently pass over arguments that so speciously support opinions which...have had the most baneful effect on the morals and manners of the female world" (96). Like *Émile*, Gregory's *Legacy* serves to reinforce masculine conceptions of womanhood as based primarily on feminine "virtues and accomplishments" (Gregory 13). Gregory divides his *Legacy* into three sections, which he suggests that he has "throw[n]...together without any studied order" (12), entitled "Conduct and Behaviour," "Amusements," and "Friendship, Love, Marriage"—the former two sections both geared towards the accomplishment of the latter.

Like Gregory, Wollstonecraft arranges her *Thoughts* into sections with headings that designate the topics she will address, and the extended title of *Thoughts* marks it as a conventional conduct book, as it reads *with Reflections on Female Conduct, in The more Important Duties of Life*. While the overall

tenor of *Thoughts* reflects the conventional didactic tone of the conduct books, Wollstonecraft does not adopt a letter format in order to address a fictional daughter/pupil (and, thus, "you," the reader),<sup>32</sup> but rather essays to "point out some important things with respect to female education" throughout the stages of life, or, as her headings indicate, from "The Nursery" to "Boarding-Schools" (5). Reflecting the experience of a woman who has headed a school for girls, *Thoughts* refashions the conventional conduct book approach by addressing the problems inherent in the current system of educating daughters rather than providing a set of 'rules' or maxims by which "you," the fictional daughter and reader, might learn to enact appropriate female behavior.<sup>33</sup>

Wollstonecraft's refashioning of the conduct book tradition is first signaled by her departure from the conventional "religion," "behavior," "accomplishment" headings; while some headings do reflect these general topics, others serve to

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<sup>32</sup> For further elaboration on the conventional conduct book approach and Gregory's relationship to that tradition, see Chapter II.

<sup>33</sup> In "Pedagogy as Self-Expression in Mary Wollstonecraft: Exorcising the Past, Finding a Voice," Mitzi Myers addresses *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* as autobiographical—as one of the various "educational modes" through which Wollstonecraft "achieved the authoritative pedagogic voice, the defined *writing* self, that allowed her escape to a larger, freer life as an educational philosopher and cultural critic." While Myers's insightful reading of *Thoughts* as a text that "progressively recodifies the rules of exemplary female behavior" has informed my work, her larger argument regarding Wollstonecraft's didactic texts as exemplary of "a revelatory autobiographical voice" (80) obscures their relationship to didactic traditions that, I would argue, Wollstonecraft seeks to refashion. Myers sees Wollstonecraft's didactic texts as modes through which she *developed* her "educational voice heard in her mature work" (80), whereas I see them doing *the same kind of work* in their appropriation of masculine discursive modes and arguments.

designate particular problems that she will address such as "Unfortunate Situation of Females, Fashionably Educated, and Left without a Fortune." And, the sections entitled "Artificial Manners," "Love," and "Matrimony," might be read as responses to Gregory's advice in "Conduct and Behaviour" and "Friendship, Love, and Marriage," as they elaborate on how Wollstonecraft "differs in opinion" on these subjects (*Vindication* 100). Unlike her approach to *Émile*, Wollstonecraft does not "amplify" and "narrow" Gregory's position—she simply "dispossesses" it, as she adopts *Legacy's* larger conceptual approach in addressing these issues without crediting Gregory, revising them to reflect her own pedagogical project.

In "Friendship, Love, Marriage," Gregory advises his daughters how to decide upon a suitable husband, as "you [his daughters] may attain a superior degree of happiness in a married state, to what you can possibly find in any other" (67). However, he actually admits to having little knowledge on the subject, remarking that "from what I have said, you will easily see that I could never pretend to advise whom you should marry; but can with great confidence advise whom you should not marry" (77). In the preface to *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, Wollstonecraft seems to be aware of this lack of paternal knowledge regarding the education of young women, suggesting "It is true, many treatises have been already written; yet it occurred to me, that much still remained to be said" (5). In *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft describes Gregory's advice as a

"system of slavery," in which he attempts to delineate a set of rules for his daughters' "Conduct and Behaviour" in public so that they may perfect "female excellence" for the purposes of catching a husband (33). She quotes the following passage from Gregory's section devoted to "Conduct and Behaviour," questioning "the necessity that the behaviour of the whole sex should be modulated to please fools:" "'Be even cautious in displaying your good sense. It will be thought you assume a superiority over the rest of the company.—But if you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from the men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts, and a cultivated understanding.'" Not only does Wollstonecraft belittle Gregory's observations on the subject of behavior, but she also incorporates her own perspective, thus gesturing towards a redefinition of the term.

The remarks [in *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*] relative to behaviour, though many of them very sensible, I entirely disapprove of, because it appears to me to be beginning, as it were, at the wrong end. A cultivated understanding, and an affectionate heart, will never want starched rules of decorum—something more substantial than seemliness will be the result; and, without understanding the behaviour here recommended, would be rank affectation. Decorum, indeed, is the one thing needful!—decorum is to supplant nature, and banish all simplicity and variety

of character out of the female world. Yet what good end can all this superficial counsel produce? It is, however, much easier to point out this or that mode of behaviour, than to set the reason to work; but, when the mind has been stored with useful knowledge, and strengthened by being employed, the regulation of the behaviour may safely be left to its guidance.

(*Vindication* 97-98)

Whereas Gregory's notion of behavior involves the concealment of one's "understanding" for the purposes of avoiding the censure of men's "malignant eye," Wollstonecraft recognizes it as a natural result of "setting the reason to work," or "storing" one's mind with "useful knowledge." In opposition to the idea that appropriate behavior requires a set of rules that might be "regulated" while the "understanding" is "concealed," Wollstonecraft emphasizes the possibility that it might be "left to [the] guidance" of "the mind." *Thoughts* serves to extend this claim from *Vindication*, further redefining Gregory's "decorum"-based approach to behavior to one that is rooted in a disavowal of "rank affectation" in favor of a "cultivated understanding" (*Thoughts* 5).

In a section addressing "Artificial Manners," Wollstonecraft writes, "That gentleness of behaviour, which makes us courteous to all, and that benevolence, which makes us loth to offend any, and studious to please every creature, is sometimes copied by the polite; but how aukward is the copy!...As humility

gives the most pleasing cast to the countenance, so from sincerity arises that artlessness of manners which is so engaging" (14). Although *Thoughts* and *Vindication* both argue that proper behavior is cultivated from within rather than imposed from without, *Thoughts* elaborates on the positive effects of behavior that reflects a "cultivated understanding." What young lady does not hope to be "courteous to all," avoid "offend[ing] any," and "please every creature?" If these "benevolen[t]" qualities are not amenable to her interests, *Thoughts* also promises that she who allows her conduct to emanate from "humility" and "sincerity" might enjoy a "pleasing cast to the countenance," and "manners" that others may find "engaging." While Gregory implies that the reward for adherence to his rules for behaviour may be the approbation of the other sex, Wollstonecraft appeals to feminine vanity, explaining that "[s]he who suffers herself to be seen as she really is, can never be thought affected. She is not solicitous to act a part; her endeavor / is not to hide; but correct her failings, and her face has of course that beauty, which an attention to the mind only gives" (14).

Having thus redefined (and emphasized the "satisfaction" resulting from) the notion of proper feminine behavior as naturally radiating from a "well ordered mind" (15,14), Wollstonecraft establishes alternative discourses on love and marriage consistent with this cognitive approach to feminine conduct. In *Vindication*, she ponders "how women are to exist in



that state where there is to be neither marrying nor giving in marriage, we are not told. For though moralists have agreed that the tenor of life seems to prove that man is prepared by various circumstances for a future state, they constantly concur in advising woman only to provide for the present" (34). Although she provides an incisive observation regarding the degraded condition of women at this time, in her criticism of "moralists" who fail to "prepare" women "for a future state," Wollstonecraft does not move beyond polemic assertion to indicate how she imagines making better provision for a woman's "future." *Thoughts*, however, allows for an elaboration of this claim, further elucidating Wollstonecraft's perspective regarding the improvement of women.

As his remark in the preface suggests, Gregory is very apprehensive about whether or not marriage will indeed make his daughters happy, vacillating from one position to another on the subject, even presenting his daughters (although grudgingly) with the possibility of becoming "Old Maids." However, in accordance with *Vindication's* argument (above), Gregory's way of addressing a situation in which "there is to be neither marrying or giving in marriage" is to avoid its implications, as he appeals to the solution that would only be available to some, the monetary allowance. He writes

But, I confess, I am not enough of a patriot to wish you to marry for the good of the public: I wish you to marry for no other reason but to make yourselves

happier. When I am so particular in my advices about your conduct, I own my heart beats with the fond hope of making you worthy the attachment of men who will deserve you, and be sensible of your merit. But heaven forbid, you should ever relinquish the ease and independence of a single life to become the slaves of a fool, or a tyrant's caprice...As these have always been my sentiments, I shall do you but justice, when I leave you in such independent circumstances as may lay you under no temptation to do from necessity what you would never do from choice. (69-70)

Rather than providing his daughters with a means of discerning that which will make them "happy" from a "tyrant's caprice," Gregory proposes to give them a choice by leaving them in financially "independent circumstances." However, his desire to leave his daughters with a "choice" in determining whether or not to marry is complicated by his description of love, which, from his perspective, is initiated -not by the woman-but by the man, as he suggests "What is commonly called love among you, is rather gratitude, and a partiality to the man who prefers you to the rest of your sex; and such a man you often marry, with little of either personal esteem or affection...a woman in this country has very little probability of marrying for love" (52-53). To assuage this reality, Gregory explains that "nature...has wisely and benevolently assigned you a greater flexibility of taste on the subject" (54).

*Thoughts* undermines Gregory's notion of marriage as justified by mere "partiality" and "flexibility of taste" on the part of the woman, invoking reason (rather than gratitude) as the basis for one's choice. In her section on "Love," Wollstonecraft claims that "I think there is not a subject that admits so little of reasoning on as love...Perhaps, before they begin to consider the matter, they see through the medium of passion, and its suggestion are often mistaken for those of reason" (28). Redefining Gregory's concept of love as acquiescence to the "gratitude" of a man who "prefers her," *Thoughts* emphasizes that "we should always try to fix in our minds the rational grounds we have for loving a person, then we may be able to recollect them when we feel disgust or resentment" (29). Representing love as a state that will be maintained rather than the means by which one "attach[es]" the affections of a man (Gregory 53), the next section entitled "Matrimony" demonstrates how Gregory's concept of marriage preparation as enhancing the feminine accomplishments might indeed constitute a "system of slavery:"

In youth, a woman endeavors to please the other sex, in order, generally speaking, to get married, and this endeavor calls forth all her powers. If she has a tolerable education, the foundation only is laid, for the mind does not soon arrive at maturity, and should not be engrossed by domestic cares before any habits are fixed. The passions also have too much influence over the judgment to suffer it to direct her in this

most important affair; and many women, I am persuaded, marry a man before they are twenty, whom they would have rejected some years after...A woman of feeling must be very much hurt if she is obliged to keep her children out of her father's company, that their morals may not be injured by his conversation...Many are but just returned from a boarding-school, when they are placed at the head of a family, and how fit they are to manage it, I leave the judicious to judge. (31)

Describing matrimony as the management of "domestic cares," *Thoughts* reveals the fact that it may just as easily become a "miserable situation" as a comfortable one, and therefore requires a greater level of education than that of the behavior and conduct appropriate to "female excellence." Choice should not be limited to the "gratitude" a young woman might feel for a male suitor or a father's allowance, but should instead constitute an exercise of the judgment in regards to a man's "principle[s]" (31), since she will ultimately be called upon to run his household and educate his children. This characterization of marriage advocates the type of relationship necessary for women to experience love as friendship, in which the woman who "exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practicing various virtues, become[s] the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband" (*Vindication* 29). Thus, *Thoughts* exposes the emptiness of Gregory's discourse concerning love and marriage, as his approach fails to account for how women are to

manage their "duties" post-matrimony, instead encouraging them make the acquisition of marriage the "endeavor" that "calls forth all her powers," leaving little room for reflection in regards to this "important affair." Redefining the terms of love and marriage as enduring conditions rather than fleeting ideals, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* illustrates how the endearing Gregory might be understood as "tyrannic," while simultaneously providing a sense of how a woman might conceive of marriage as preparation for a "future state" rather than an occupation of the "present" (*Vindication* 34).

Despite their reputation as uninteresting precursors to Wollstonecraft's groundbreaking feminist work, *Original Stories* and *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* serve to clarify (by means of stories or examples) and extend the arguments she proposes in her now famous 'feminist manifesto.' *Original Stories* further defines her concept of virtue, while *Thoughts* serves to justify the grounds for her vehement attack of the 'endearing' Gregory. Therefore, these texts call into question the common assumption that didactic texts for women were merely tools of social control, revealing instead how they might work to redefine traditional 18<sup>th</sup> century representations of womanhood.

#### 4.0 WOLLSTONECRAFT'S "OTHER WOMEN:" FEMINIST PEDAGOGIES IN *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* AND *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY*

The feminist critical tendency to lionize Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* while dismissing her pedagogical writing extends to criticism that tries to establish a Wollstonecraftian legacy in the work of (post)romantic women writers such as Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë. Feminist critics seek to establish a relationship between Austen and Brontë's work and the more radical and overtly polemicized versions of late 18<sup>th</sup> century feminism they see represented in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. However, sharing Wollstonecraft's commitment to feminist pedagogy, the work of Austen and Brontë borrows from earlier didactic traditions and, more specifically, reflects the pedagogy established in Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories* (1788). In the final two chapters, I will situate Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories* within two distinct didactic traditions, the woman as pedagogue and rational moralist traditions,<sup>34</sup> which also include Sarah Fielding's educational novel *The Governess* (1749). The

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<sup>34</sup> I have adopted the term "rational moralist" from Demers and Moyles's *From Instruction to Delight: An Anthology of Children's Literature to 1850* (1982). For further discussion of my adaptation of the term, see Chapter VI, footnote 39.

subsequent chapters underscore the ways in which didactic traditions simultaneously overlap with and depart from one another.

Both the woman as pedagogue and rational moralist traditions incorporate exemplary female figures that, I argue, are adapted into and play significant roles in Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). By adapting these traditions, Austen and Brontë generate pedagogies that emphasize women's capacity to cultivate reason and virtue in the absence of male influence. Making structural connections between Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories* and Austen (in Chapter IV) and Brontë (In Chapter V), I will argue that Austen's work reflects Wollstonecraft's in its emphasis on the importance of female relationships as a necessary part of the learning process, while Brontë's 19<sup>th</sup> century representation of feminist pedagogy sanctions rivalry and antagonistic relationships amongst women. I recognize the change in feminist pedagogical approach from Austen to Brontë as marking a significant transformation in the understanding of feminism from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, as feminism as a shared goal amongst women gave way to the quest for feminism as individualism. As we continue to establish the *rights of woman* in postmodern society, I suggest that we might incorporate Wollstonecraft's work into our own teaching as a way of challenging the self-serving version of feminism that *Jane Eyre*

promotes and helping students learn to appropriate and revise masculine authoritative discourses of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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"We need to examine female images in Jane Austen's work in relation to the liberationist philosophy of that 'feminist tradition' which precedes Jane Austen in the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, and which, of course, has blossomed into the feminist revolt of our time" (Brown 324). Lloyd W. Brown's 1973 call for a reading of Austen through the lens of Wollstonecraft's "liberationist philosophy" situates the larger feminist project of "reclaiming Mary Wollstonecraft" in relation to the literary era in which she wrote—the romantic period.<sup>35</sup> In arguing for the recognition of Wollstonecraft as a harbinger of or a central figure within the rise of a romantic era feminism characterized by an emphasis on "rational thought" (Lau 221), critics such as Beth Lau, Anne Mellor, Margaret Kirkham, Alison Sulloway, and Susan J. Wolfson focus on her as a "feminist theorist" (Sulloway 5) whose discourse of "feminine romanticism" may be read in the works of Jane Austen and other woman writers of the romantic

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<sup>35</sup> In "Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*," from *A Companion to Romanticism*, Beth Lau explains the controversy surrounding Austen's inclusion in the Romantic canon, and there are various studies that address the extent to which Austen might really be considered a "Romantic" writer, such as Clara Tuite's *Romantic Austen* (2002) and William Deresiewicz's *Jane Austen and the Romantic Poets* (2004). However, I use the term Romantic to delineate the specific (although now arguable) time period during which both Austen and Wollstonecraft wrote—not as a means of describing their work as incorporating certain "Romantic" topoi or imbibing a certain "spirit of the age" as described by Meyer Abrams, or as reflecting an "ideology located in specific political and social events" as per Jerome McGann (Mellor 13, 1).



period. Anne Mellor's *Romanticism and Gender* offers the most comprehensive discussion of Wollstonecraft as the propagator of a "feminine Romantic ideology:" she suggests that "in contrast to a masculine Romantic ideology, an ideology that affirmed the rights and feelings of the natural man, Wollstonecraft propounded an equally revolutionary but very different ideology... grounded in a belief in the rational capacity and equality of woman" (33). Like Mellor, other characterizations of Wollstonecraft as a "spirit" that seems to have "taken control of [Charlotte Brontë's] pen" (Diedrick 22-23) or of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) as "constituting the essence of post-Enlightenment rational feminism" (Kirkham 236), or as a feminist "'voice'" whose "'echoes'" might be heard "throughout Jane Austen's novels'" as "themes of the Wollstonecraftian revolution" (Sulloway reading Nina Auerbach 49), posit her as the consolidating force of feminist thought during this era. This is not to say that critics fail to acknowledge the existence of other "infamous" feminist figures such as Mary Hays and Catherine Macaulay (Sulloway 4-5); however, Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, considered to be "the most favorably reviewed, widely read, and ... lastingly influential feminist tract of the period" (Mellor 39), is generally recognized as that which augurs the feminist "spirit of the age."

The historical reality of book circulation in the romantic period as documented by William St. Clair in *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (2004) calls these claims into question.

When considering *Vindication's* influence on later texts, print history reveals that *Vindication's* mark on literary culture was quite limited, especially in comparison to the widely circulating mass of conduct books that dominated the book market at that time (St. Clair 275), and women writers such as Catharine Macaulay made similar claims regarding the inferior education of women. I do not intend to belittle the achievement of *Vindication*—it should go without saying that a woman writing polemic at this time might be considered a pioneer simply for her unprecedented manipulation of a hitherto 'masculine' genre. And I would suggest that we may identify Wollstonecraft's relationship to women writers such as Jane Austen, but not by recognizing Wollstonecraft as a feminist "spirit," "voice," or purveyor of "romantic ideology" that emerges in their work. Rather, I would like to suggest that Wollstonecraft and Austen both share a relationship to a didactic tradition of women's writing that emphasizes the importance of female relationships in the acquisition of reason and virtue. More specifically, both incorporate exemplars of reason-based and accomplishment-based female education, which emerge throughout the Wollstonecraft canon, and are first established in her quasi-novelistic conduct book entitled *Original Stories* (1788).

St. Clair challenges the notion of Wollstonecraft as purveyor of "feminine romanticism." He addresses the relationship of print culture to the reading public during this time by careful analysis of "the governing structures which determined

the texts that were made available for reading in the romantic period" (St. Clair 13). In Chapter XIV entitled "Horizons of Expectations," St. Clair describes how we might read Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* as an "outlier" against the backdrop of the "weighted statement" of "conduct texts" proliferating throughout the "reading population" at this time (276-77). Despite the fact that *Vindication* "is often said to have been immediately influential and to have continued to be so," St. Clair suggests that "when situated in its material and cultural context, however, a different pattern emerges" (277). Ultimately, "with only a few thousand copies of the book manufactured during the whole of the first century after first publication, a figure often surpassed by Scott and Byron on the day of publication, it would have been difficult, and unusual, for anyone, woman or man, to find and read the book" (St. Clair 278). By questioning the likelihood of a sustained readership for *Vindication*, St. Clair challenges the validity of claims that *Vindication* laid the groundwork for the feminist "revolution."

While we cannot measure influence by the weight of print of competing texts, for every family that had access to the *Vindication*, there were probably fifty or a hundred which owned a book which advised against Wollstonecraft's ideas ... The fact that Wollstonecraft dashed off the *Vindication* so quickly may suggest that she was already familiar with the arguments which had

perhaps been the subject of a hundred conversations. In this individual case, and without lapsing into exaggerations about the power of great books, we can, I suggest, read Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* as representative of a broader consciousness which, because of her unusual talents and opportunities, she was able uniquely to turn into print. In terms of impact, however, from what we know of the constructions of ideal femininity prevalent from the eighteenth century until the suffragist movements at the end of the nineteenth, Wollstonecraft's book made little or no difference to general attitudes to women and scarcely dented the mainstream ideology of femininity prevalent through most of society. It was simply overwhelmed. (279)

As St. Clair suggests, Wollstonecraft's influence cannot be discerned in a later text as a "voice" or a set of feminist principles, since *Vindication* synthesizes and reifies ideas that "had perhaps been the subject of a hundred conversations." Although valuable in their attempt to imagine how Wollstonecraft's "revolutionary ideology permeated the writing of such novelists as Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen, Susan Ferrier, Helen Maria Williams, ... and many others" (Mellor 39), feminist critical approaches have failed to identify a material link between Wollstonecraft and her successors—one that demonstrates Wollstonecraft's contribution to this commonplace set of feminist

"arguments." The brief and discontinuous nature of *Vindication's* print run reinforces the idea of the text as an interlocutor within "a broader consciousness" that ultimately "made little or no difference to general attitudes to women."

I am not denying the possibility that women writers sought out (or encountered via happenstance) the few copies of *Vindication* circulating amongst friends or coteries. However, given the circumstances of print culture at this time, in which there was "a boom in the publishing both of conduct books ... and didactic texts" that "appear to have been given and received throughout the reading population" (St. Clair 275-276), it is more likely that writers outside of Wollstonecraft's immediate sphere of influence got to know her as the writer of her didactic text for young women entitled *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788), which, unlike *Vindication*, was still available to readers in 1820 (St. Clair 658). Whereas *Vindication* was first printed as a "long pamphlet" comprised of "an essentially ephemeral type of print" which later "disappeared from the catalogues of ... circulating libraries ... before the turn of the century" (277-278), *Original Stories* was an illustrated book that, like other didactic texts of the period, may have been (according to the fashion) "rebound in leather" and displayed in the library,<sup>36</sup> or

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<sup>36</sup> St. Clair explains that expensive leather bindings were essential during the romantic period, as it was difficult to "turn over the pages or to find the place" in a text that was in its original, temporary binding of "cardboard covered with blue or grey sugar paper" (192). Texts left in their original condition did not last long, given that "[w]rappers quickly curled and boards fell off" (192). He further

incorporated "into circulating libraries and school rooms" (St. Clair 275). Reprinted in both 1791 and 1796, it is plausible that *Original Stories* served to introduce later (post)romantic writers—not to the radical "voice" of *Vindication*, but to the didactic teachings of *Original Stories*' paradigm of feminine virtue, Mrs. Mason.

Although Wollstonecraft published two other didactic texts for women or girls entitled *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) and *The Female Reader* (1789), they went out of print well before *Original Stories*; neither text was reprinted, nor were they available for purchase after 1794 (St. Clair 658–659). Unlike Wollstonecraft's other didactic texts, *Original Stories* incorporated fictional elements and (in a few editions) illustrations as a means of engaging readers. Engraved by William Blake, the plates depict Mrs. Mason, her two orphaned upper-class charges, Mary and Caroline, and a variety of other characters in scenes that correspond to the educational scenarios that unfold. However, unlike conduct books for women that often featured a parent or mentor figure,<sup>37</sup> Wollstonecraft establishes an educational regimen that moves beyond instruction designed (either implicitly or explicitly) to make women more marketable as potential wives. Rather than addressing the young female

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explains that one might expect to find expensive binding "on books of philosophy, travel, antiquities, sermons, poetry, and conduct, but only occasionally on novels" (193). Because book prices included original retail as well as binding, "in the romantic period the new books of the time were expensive luxuries which could be bought, if at all, only by the richest groups in society" (St. Clair 196).

<sup>37</sup> See my discussion of Gregory and Chapone in Chapter II.

reader in regards to the various accomplishments it hopes to instill in her, the Preface to *Original Stories* reveals its relationship to 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophical thought, calling into question "the present state of society:"

These conversations and tales are accommodated to the present state of society; which obliges the author to attempt to cure those faults by reason, which ought never to have taken root in the infant mind. ... I believe those who examine their own minds will readily agree with me, that reason, with difficulty, conquers settled habits, even when it is arrived at some degree of maturity; why then do we suffer children to be bound with fetters, which their half-formed faculties cannot break ... But to wish that parents would, themselves, mould the ductile passions, is a chimerical wish, for the present generation have their own passions to combat with, and fastidious pleasures to pursue, neglecting those pointed out by nature: we must therefore pour premature knowledge into the succeeding one; and, teaching virtue, explain the nature of vice. Cruel Necessity. (359)

*Original Stories'* Preface reveals that, like *Vindication*, the text emphasizes reason (rather than alluring accomplishments) as the means of achieving feminine virtue. Criticizing the "present generation," Wollstonecraft moves beyond the construction of "conduct" literature to establish a theoretical groundwork for a

conceptually based educational regimen, in which "[t]he tendency of reasoning obviously tends to fix principles of truth and humanity on a solid and simple foundation; and to make religion an active, invigorating director of the affections, and not a mere attention to forms (360). She suggests she has chosen a fictional approach to facilitate active reflection, as "the Tales which were written to illustrate the moral, may recall it, when the mind has gained sufficient strength to discuss the argument from which it was deduced" (360). Wollstonecraft's construction of a reason-based educational regimen marks her relationship to "a large group of authors who wrote improving books for children between 1750 and 1850" identified as "rational moralists" who, influenced by the educational philosophies of Locke and Rousseau, sought to "cultivate rational thought and moral judgment" in children (Demers and Moyles 121).<sup>38</sup> To achieve this end, the textual tradition established by the rational moralists featured "'carefully designed narratives, and...positive as well as negative examples to shape children's understanding. All emphasized tutelage: most of their stories featured a hired tutor, but sometimes a parent is the principal dispenser of information'" (Demers and Moyles 121).<sup>39</sup> Probably the most

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<sup>38</sup> Writers such as Thomas Day and Maria Edgeworth published didactic texts representative of this philosophy. For further reading on the rational moralists, see Patricia Demers and Gordon Moyles's *From Instruction to Delight: An Anthology of Children's Literature to 1850*. (Oxford, 1982).

<sup>39</sup> Demers and Moyles characterize the work of the rational moralists in terms of the philosophy that inspired them. However, I refer to their work as part of a tradition, as their texts share common features with



influential of the female rational moralists is Sarah Fielding, whose *The Governess; Or, The Little Female Academy* (1749) "marks...new directions in children's literature" as the first children's book "directed at young women" and perhaps "the first English novel written for children" (Ward 29-30, 28). Like Wollstonecraft, Fielding appropriates "Lockean educational philosophy," showing that "girls as well as boys are capable of exercising reason" (Ward 30).

The didactic design of texts that comprise the rational moralist tradition generates a different type of relationship to readers than conduct books that incorporate the parent or mentor figure. Rather than addressing didactic precepts to a fictional pupil in a series of letters, the 'recipient' of which necessarily becomes "you" the reader, texts in the rational moralist tradition generate fictional learning situations in which the mentor/tutor/parent figure *interacts* with the pupils, affirming their agency as moral and intellectual subjects capable of learning through example. To encourage readers to learn from the scenarios as well, the stories are designed to "engage and hold the reader's attention" through "varying degrees" of "narrative, dialogue, characterization, and incident" (Demers and Moyles 122). Fielding's narrative structure takes on the form of a female-centered "communal *bildungsroman*" in which girls learn through positive and negative female role models "to see the

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one another (elaborated above) that reflect their philosophy of education.

rewards of virtuous living" (Ward 33).<sup>40</sup> *The Governess* and thus—to varying degrees—many of its adaptations that emerged throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries derive their didactic frameworks from John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), part of the "old canon" of English literature that was "produced in the largest numbers" during the romantic period (St. Clair 131). Representative of the puritan providential tradition,<sup>41</sup> *Pilgrim's Progress* describes the perils of an 'everyman' traveler named Christian who embarks on a spiritual journey fraught with everyman characters such as Obstinate, Mistrust, Atheist, etc. who attempt to dissuade him from reaching the holy destination of "Mount Zion" or the Kingdom of God. Christian relies on characters such as Piety, Charity, and Prudence to guide him to

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<sup>40</sup> Adaptations of Fielding took on different forms, and did not necessarily adhere to her rational moralist philosophy. Some of the more noteworthy are Eliza Haywood's didactic novel entitled *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), Maria Edgeworth's "The Good French Governess" (1801), and Mrs. Sherwood's evangelical adaptation of *The Governess* (1820). Fielding's text might also be recognized as a predecessor of 19<sup>th</sup> century novels such as Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* that recast the journey plot of *Pilgrim's Progress* as female bildungsroman.

<sup>41</sup> In *The Reluctant Pilgrim* (1966), J. Paul Hunter offers a comprehensive description of the various attributes of the 18<sup>th</sup> century "providence tradition" which "focuses upon the strange and surprising aspects of [...] events and interprets them within a religious and philosophical framework which invests them with important meaning. And providence literature reflects the pattern of Christian experience central to the Puritan myth and organizes its *exempla* into a dramatic realization of the historical cycle, seen teleologically." He suggests that *Pilgrim's Progress* might be characterized as "spiritual biography," in the sense that "ultimately the pilgrimage of an allegorical figure through life is not far from the typical journey through life of a real person," in which events "are validated relative to the total pattern of an individual's life, and the events are 'improved' appropriately in order to draw the reader himself to a special view of religion and to a personal practice of higher morality" (73, 90).

his intended destination. In Part I, Christian's wife, like Eve, attempts to steer him in the wrong direction, as she and other "Relations" "thought to drive away his [spiritual] distemper by harsh and surly carriages to him: sometimes they would deride, sometimes they would chide, and sometimes they would quite neglect him" (9). However, in Part II (1684), recognizing the error of her ways, she embarks on her own journey to the Celestial City. Mirroring the perils endured by Christian, Christiana encounters everywoman characters that try to either guide or mislead her along the way such as Mercie and Mrs. Timorous.

*The Governess* recasts Bunyan's allegorical journey towards Eternal Life as a fictional female-centered journey towards the acquisition and development of reason and virtue, in which everywoman characters such as Miss Jenny Peace and Miss Lucy Sly exemplify the best (and worst) qualities a woman might possess. However, *The Governess* dispenses with the quest plot of *Pilgrim's Progress*, emphasizing instead the building of "'an ideal female society'" (Ward 35); and, "the process of reformation" takes place in "a little Arbour" where Jenny Peace (a paradigm of feminine virtue) and the other eight pupils share their "free time" along with fairy tales and stories that prompt the telling of "life stories" which "highlight[] the various faults that marked their behavior prior to coming to Mrs. Teachum's school" (Ward 33). Like *The Governess*, *Original Stories* makes use of storytelling and life histories as a means of

exemplifying virtuous and unacceptable behaviors; however, Wollstonecraft adapts Bunyan's quest plot into the domestic framework of her narrative, extending her pupils' reach beyond the insularity of the boarding school to which Mrs. Teachum's pupils are generally confined, allowing them to encounter "real life" both in their daily routines and through Mrs. Mason's stories that are supposedly derived from it. Mrs. Mason takes an active role in the girls' learning experience, introducing Mary and Caroline to various people from different walks of life—from "Honest Jack the shipwrecked Sailor" to "a Poor Family in London"—guiding them in the process of learning from life experience.

Like *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Original Stories* is comprised of "incidents" that seem "mundanely inconsequential;" however, as they are the "unimaginary problems of living besetting the average man and woman of the time," they ultimately enable Mrs. Mason's adolescent charges "to learn[] by experience" (Keeble xiv-xv). And, given that Mary and Caroline "were shamefully ignorant [and] had caught every prejudice that the vulgar casually instill" (361), their behavior during these various encounters with life experience provides the opportunity for Mrs. Mason to relate how their bad behavior manifests itself in the lives of everywoman characters such as Jane Fretful and Lady Sly. For instance, in addressing Mary's negligence in dress, Mrs. Mason invokes their acquaintance 'Mrs. Dowdy' as an example of what happens when "indolence" in such matters becomes habitual—

"she is sometimes a disgusting figure, and, at others, a very taudry flirt" (409-410). In contrast, however, Mrs. Mason suggests "of all the women whom I have ever met with, Mrs. Trueman seems the freest from vanity, and those frivolous views [regarding dress] which degrade the female character" (410). Wollstonecraft's representation of poor female education as a problem that affects the behavior of women marks *Original Stories*' larger conceptual departure from *The Governess*; rather than establishing "an ideal female society" that "represents the children in a state of nature," where, even at the end of the text, Mrs. Teachum's pupils (with the exception of Jenny Peace) remain part of this "well-regulated Society" (Ward 35, Fielding 175), Wollstonecraft establishes a female-centered didacticism that anticipates young girls becoming women, evidenced in her representation of Mrs. Mason (rather than Fielding's 14 year old Jenny Peace) as the central exemplary figure. In the end, Mary and Caroline say goodbye to Mrs. Mason and are now considered "candidates for [her] friendship" rather than her pupils, and they are left to the task of exercising reason and virtue in their own lives. The idea that the girls' youth will ultimately give way to womanhood surfaces throughout *Original Stories* in Wollstonecraft's emphasis on how virtuous/problematic behaviors in childhood reflect and eventually translate into more profound (mis)behaviors in adulthood, and thus, like Wollstonecraft's other didactic writings, *Original Stories* functions to educate women as well as girls.

As a female-centered pedagogy, *Original Stories* serves to extend the argument of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by elaborating terms that it leaves relatively undefined—namely what it means to enact feminine virtue and rationality. Although predominantly didactic rather than polemic, *Original Stories* reinforces the various “cornerstones” of “feminine Romantic ideology,” the most prominent of which are the representation of “the rational woman, rational love, ... the preservation of the domestic affections, [and] responsibility for the mental, moral and physical well-being and growth of all the members of the family” (Mellor 38). However, it is not in this general representation of the “rational” woman that we might discern Wollstonecraft’s relationship to Austen or other (post) romantic woman writers; as I suggest above, the “cornerstones” of “feminine Romantic ideology” could easily be attributed to other women writers such as Macaulay or Hays. Wollstonecraft’s contribution to the discourse concerning women’s education at this time might be recognized in her fixation on Rousseau’s ideal (weak and dissipated) woman, who appears throughout the Wollstonecraft canon in personal anecdotes, hypothetical scenarios, and as fictionalized characters, usually in conjunction with a (re)imagined counterpart. In *Original Stories*, she (and her counterparts) are exemplified in the everywoman characters that Mrs. Mason invokes to demonstrate the effects of good and bad female behaviors. *Original Stories* also furthers the conventional argument for the “rational woman” in its

representation of a female-centered space where women learn from, question, and respond to one another, thus depicting a learning experience that takes place wholly in the absence of male influence. Undermining conventional representations of the 'domestic' space in terms of what it lacks—the discipline and intellectual rigor afforded by the male interlocutor—*Original Stories* suggests that the home and its various intersecting locales (where one shops and visits) serve as ideal sites for women to cultivate reason and virtue. Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*, like Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories*, deploy female-centered pedagogies that incorporate characters to exemplify the effects of poor female education, teaching the heroine(s) how to better adhere to the principles of reason and virtue.

Similar to feminist studies that note the achievement of Wollstonecraft's work in *Vindication* while overlooking her redefining of established didactic traditions in *Original Stories* and *The Female Reader*, current feminist critical approaches to Austen imagine didacticism as a mode of writing she sought to escape, as this mode's association with male conduct book writers and conservative women writers seemed to promote conformity to normative expectations of female behavior and conduct (see, e.g., Spencer 143). Didacticism is thus recognized as the antipode of feminism and, in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, came to be understood as the antipode of pleasurable reading as well. In *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel* (1983), a critical study of Austen as

"intending to manipulate and educate her readers' responses" (10), Jan Fergus remarks on the modern tendency to eschew associating Austen's work with didacticism:

...although Austen's powers to delight are almost universally acknowledged, her successfully didactic methods and intentions are now seldom claimed. Sometimes they are even resented when discovered. A hostility to these intentions, resulting in obliviousness, is perfectly illustrated when Andrew Wright asks: if Marianne Dashwood 'is meant merely to exemplify an unlaudable predisposition to 'enthusiasm,' why is she so lovable?' (10)

Calling attention to the opposition established between instructing readers and delighting them, Fergus herself nonetheless attempts to determine the didactic strategies deployed by Austen's novels that enable them to "educate" readers' "judgment and sympathy" without invoking the didactic traditions in which the "imperfect heroine" and the "technique of contrast" emerge (7).<sup>42</sup> Fergus understands Austen's work as

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<sup>42</sup>Fergus recognizes Austen's didactic strategy as a response to the conventional assumptions of "moralists of the period" who made use of exemplary characters, believing that "readers were likely to imitate the actions and adopt the sentiments of characters in fiction" (4). Eschewing "the perfect characters who became a convention of didacticism," Austen "constructs among the feelings, judgments, predicaments and conduct of all her characters parallels and contrasts so elaborate and insistent that the reader cannot escape comparing, weighing and evaluating" (7). By means of this approach, Fergus argues that Austen "educate[s] her readers' responses" (7). However, didactic writers such as Fielding and Wollstonecraft employed imperfect characters as well as the technique of contrast in service of their



influenced by the 18<sup>th</sup> century novel, primarily the work of Samuel Richardson, which also essays to "elicit and control ["the reader's response to fiction"] for didactic purposes" (61). However, Fergus's understanding of Austen as exercising an "emotional didacticism" does not account for whom and to what end her didactic approach might be useful or beneficial. Therefore, Fergus's project reveals the extent to which didacticism was discredited as a way of understanding Austen, as her own approach to didacticism serves not to elaborate on the relationship Austen shares with didactic traditions, but to emphasize the function of didacticism as pleasure or as a training of the emotions rather than the intellect or moral capacity.

Jane Spencer addresses Austen's relationship to didacticism in *The Rise of the Woman Novelist* (1986); unlike Fergus, Spencer does so by recognizing Austen's work as "aris[ing] out of a tradition [her precursors] established" (167). Spencer marks Austen's relationship to the didactic tradition of the "reformed heroine" which, she argues, "serve[d] as a kind of dramatized conduct book for young women" (142) and included texts by women writers such as Eliza Haywood, Sarah Fielding, Fanny Burney, and Maria Edgeworth. This novel generally featured a "fallible, but unfallen heroine, who learned from her mistakes and reformed her ways" (142), demonstrating that "women are capable of moral growth" (143). Focusing on the figure of the "lover-mentor" who

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didactic projects, which Austen has adapted and developed into novelistic discourse.

enables the heroine to "reform her ways," Spencer reads Austen's novels as recasting the lover-mentor figure, not as a "morally superior guardian," but as the heroine's equal in moral capacity (169). Spencer argues that, in Austen's appropriation of this tradition, "the picture of the learning heroine...is most fully and convincingly developed" (169). While Spencer acknowledges Austen's interest in "expos[ing]...the shortcomings of the usual female education," she suggests that associations between Austen and Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* are strained, since "didacticism is not, for [Austen], a method to be transformed into an attack on male authority and prerogative" (168).

However, Spencer overlooks the ways in which Austen's representation of the heroine as a "woman who can rise above trifling and frivolity and deserves to be treated as a rational creature" reflects the work of Fielding and Wollstonecraft in the female rational moralist tradition, which shares various affinities with the reformed heroine tradition. Eliza Haywood's didactic novel *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) which, as Spencer argues, offers "a full treatment of the theme of the reformed heroine" (147) exhibits multiple similarities to Fielding's *The Governess*, primarily in its deployment of the exemplary and allegorically named female figure and its representation of female reform as recognized in a "moment of self-knowledge" (Spencer 152). The tradition of the reformed heroine departs from female-centered pedagogies such as Fielding's and Wollstonecraft's by downplaying the importance of

the heroine's relationship to other women, representing the lover-mentor figure (or a man) as the primary impetus for the heroine's process of acquiring self-knowledge. Focusing on Austen's appropriation of the lover-mentor figure, Spencer doesn't acknowledge the importance of female relationships in Austen's novels that reflect the female rational moralists' emphasis on women's "moral growth" as something that might be acquired in the absence of male influence and be exercised in the interests of virtue—not merely as a means of acquiring a husband.

Critics often regard the most important relationship in *Pride and Prejudice* as the one that develops between Elizabeth and Darcy, or recognize the text, as Nina Auerbach has argued, as a representation the nature of female life in the "the larger community of England" in which "men... create whatever strength of sisterhood we see in the novel" (Auerbach 332). Although, as Spencer argues, Darcy takes on an important role in Elizabeth's learning process, Elizabeth also learns from the women who threaten to undermine her happiness with Darcy. Austen's work reflects Wollstonecraft's representation of female-centered pedagogy as a way of teaching the "learning heroine" to avoid the pitfalls of the conventional late 18<sup>th</sup> century education for women, which generally emphasized 'pleasing' men through artifice and feigned delicacy.

There is no direct evidence (in juvenilia or correspondence) to suggest that Austen read Wollstonecraft or Fielding, but Austen's works often allude to and manipulate

various doxa established by didactic traditions. In *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood* (1989), Alison Sulloway remarks on the influence of conduct books on Austen's writing, suggesting that "Austen's fiction and her correspondence from her earliest writing days ironically reflects the restricted province in which her sex had placed her. The hitherto unrecognized savagery of her juvenilia, the plight of her heroines and the varied responses of each one to conduct-book wisdom, clerical or lay, patriarchal or radical or moderate feminist, all indicate how much Austen had absorbed 'the woman question'" (41). She describes further connections between Austen's work and the conduct book tradition, evidenced by Austen's "satiric war upon [Rev. James] Fordyce" (23-24), whose *Sermons to Young Women* (1766) appears in *Pride and Prejudice* as Mr. Collins's failed attempt to engage the Bennet sisters with a reading from a "book of a serious stamp" (Austen 47). Referencing Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*, Sulloway demonstrates how some of the conventional representations of male suitors in conduct books are exemplified in Austen's works such as "the egotistical seducer, who looks and behaves tenderly, but who promises nothing," who might be recognized in "Austen's George Wickham, Henry Crawford, John Willoughby, and Frank Churchill" (27). She goes on to describe "Elizabeth Bennet's engagement to Darcy," which is characterized by "gratitude" for his preference to her, as a "recreat[ion]" of Gregory's monitory advice which suggests "'not one' out 'of a million' Englishwomen was likely to 'marry with any degree of

love'" (28). Given Austen's various representations and manipulations of well-established doxa from the conduct book tradition, we might also draw connections between Austen's work and the didactic texts written by the female rational moralists. She is known to have "read and admired" women writers in the reformed heroine tradition such as Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth, so it is certainly possible that her overlapping interest in the conduct book tradition and that of the reformed heroine led her to take an interest in Fielding's *The Governess* (who also wrote in the reformed heroine tradition) or one of its adaptations circulating throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. As Austen was part of the "minor gentry" (Sulloway 17), an educational novel or set of didactic stories would have been a likely possession for a family with two daughters and possibly a part of the reading regimen at the boarding school she attended.

#### **4.1 SOPHY AS "THE OTHER WOMAN" IN *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* AND *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY***

In *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft rebukes "sensualist[s]" who "endeavor to keep women in the dark" to ensure the existence of a "play-thing" for themselves. Within the context of this diatribe, she references *Émile*, Rousseau's treatise on education:

I now principally allude to Rousseau, for his character of Sophia is, undoubtedly, a captivating one, though it appears to me grossly unnatural; however it is not the superstructure, but the foundation of her character, the principles on which her education was built, that I mean to attack [...] Is this the man, who, in his ardour for virtue, would banish all the soft arts of peace, and almost carry us back to Spartan discipline? ... How are these mighty sentiments lowered when he describes the pretty foot and enticing airs of his little favorite! (24-25)

Explicitly vilifying, Wollstonecraft accuses Rousseau of establishing a rigorous standard of virtue for his 'pupil' Émile, while Émile's "helpmeet" Sophy learns to put on "enticing airs" for the purposes of "pleasing" men (22). As Rousseau's exemplar for his system of education, in which "obedience" is a woman's primary virtue, Sophy is represented throughout *Vindication* as the antipode of the rational woman. Wollstonecraft's hypothetical description of a woman "trained up to obedience," for example, recalls Sophy's traits:

But supposing, no very improbable conjecture, that a being only taught to please must still find her happiness in pleasing;—what an example of folly, not to say vice, will she be to her innocent daughters! The mother will be lost in the coquette, and, instead of making friends of her daughters ... they invite

comparison, and drive her from the throne of beauty, who has never thought of a seat on the bench of reason ... It does not require a lively pencil, or the discriminating outline of a caricature, to sketch the domestic miseries and petty vices which such a mistress of a family diffuses. Still she only acts as a woman ought to act, brought up according to Rousseau's system. She can never be reproached for being masculine, or turning out of her sphere; nay, she may observe another of his grand rules, and, cautiously preserving her reputation free from spot, be reckoned a good kind of woman. Yet in what respect can she be termed good? She abstains, it is true, without any great struggle, from committing gross crimes; but how does she fulfil her duties? Duties!—in truth she has enough to think of to adorn her body and nurse a weak constitution.[...] These are the blessed effects of a good education! These the virtues of man's help-mate! (48-49)

Recognizing the ways in which Sophy's poor education might affect her domestic relationships, Wollstonecraft extends the conventional conduct book argument regarding coquetry<sup>43</sup> to the

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<sup>43</sup> Addressed in both Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774) as well as Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773), women who engaged in the art of coquetry led men on so that they might be flattered and admired. Coquetry was considered a dangerous vice, as it ruined a woman's reputation and jeopardized the prospect of marriage.

post-marital condition, suggesting that a woman only interested in attracting men with her "beauty" will inevitably view her daughters as "rivals." This is, however, acceptable according to Rousseau's "grand rules" which, reinforcing physical weakness as a feminine virtue, ultimately render women incapable of fulfilling their domestic "duties." Sophy's lack of education is not only a detriment to her own family, but also to anyone who has the misfortune to depend on her, as Wollstonecraft suggests,

I once knew a weak woman of fashion, who was more than commonly proud of her delicacy and sensibility. She thought a distinguishing taste and puny appetite the height of all human perfection, and acted accordingly.—I have seen this weak sophisticated being neglect all the duties of life, yet recline with self-complacency on a sofa, and boast of her want of appetite as a proof of delicacy[...]Yet, at the moment, I have seen her insult a worthy old gentlewoman, whom unexpected misfortunes had made dependent on her gratitude. (44)

Sophy imbibes all of the qualities of this "irrational monster," as she fails to nurture her children, her dependents, and her husband, wasting away in indolence, self-deprivation, and "self-complacency." Eventually her beauty fails her, leaving her with nothing but "a spring of bitterness," making way for puerile sentiments of "jealousy or vanity" (27). Wollstonecraft shows that educating women to please men ironically constitutes



"preparation[] for adultery," since "the woman who has only been taught to please will soon find that her charms are oblique as sunbeams, and that they cannot have much effect on her husband's heart when they are seen every day... she will try to please other men; and in the emotions raised by the expectation of new conquests, endeavour to forget the mortification her love or pride has received" (84,27).

As I argue in Chapter III, Sophy's vices may be recognized in *Original Stories* everywoman characters—each amplifying one of the particular faults outlined above (in *Vindication*). Serving the important didactic function of exemplifying what *not* to do, Sophy manifests herself as the hot-tempered Jane Fretful, the deceitful Lady Sly, and the perpetually vain fashion victim Mrs. Dowdy. Wollstonecraft's representations of these debased and debauched women set her apart from other contemporary writers arguing for improved women's education. Whereas writers such as Catharine Macaulay emphasize how women *should* obtain their education, Wollstonecraft elaborates the detrimental effects of the current system through anecdotes from personal experience and hypothetical scenarios in *Thoughts* and *Vindication* and through fictional characters in *Original Stories*, *Mary*, and *Maria*.

Exemplars of poor female education play various roles throughout Austen's work for the same reason they emerge in *Original Stories*—to attempt to undermine (and therefore to test)

the virtue of the stories' heroines.<sup>44</sup> Though Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and later novels incorporate exemplars of poor female education that lead the heroine astray,<sup>45</sup> the titles of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* signal the novels' relationship to the exemplary strategies of the female rational moralists who emphasized the particular faults that a reason-based education might remedy, often in conjunction with their positive alternatives. And, like Mary and Caroline, the female protagonists in *Sense and Sensibility* as well as *Pride and Prejudice* are a pair of sisters, whose "ignorance" regarding certain matters (e.g., Elizabeth Bennet's prejudice and Marianne Dashwood's sensibility) requires that they learn through experience. These texts mirror the female-centered learning

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<sup>44</sup> In "The Polemics of Incomprehension: Mother and Daughter in *Pride and Prejudice*," Jean Ferguson Carr addresses another of *Pride and Prejudice*'s marginalized female figures in her discussion of the "disvalued fictional role" of Mrs. Bennet, who she sees as representative of "a cultural concern over what is perceived as women's and, more explicitly, mothers' responsibilities and failures" (74, 81). She argues that Mrs. Bennet's "failures and inadequacies" that "embarrass" Elizabeth actually point to their similar "struggle with patriarchal powers" (74). Carr suggests that while it may seem that Elizabeth has "risen above the devalued position of her mother...Lizzie shares more with her mother than her father or the narrator acknowledges or than she herself can recognize" (74). She further argues that Mrs. Bennet's "embarrassing outbreaks concern Lizzie partially because they proclaim what she must conceal and partially because the reception of these remarks shows Lizzie the contradictory proscriptions for women" (78). In order to succeed as "the heroine [who] wins property and wealth through daring and rebellion," Elizabeth must take on the role of "a 'bad daughter' to her unworthy mother" (80). Like the exemplars of poor female education that I will discuss here, Mrs. Bennet is a woman that Elizabeth must avoid becoming if she is to find happiness with Darcy.

<sup>45</sup>For example, in *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland befriends the vain and coquettish Isabella Thorpe who slights Catherine's brother by seeking the affection of a wealthier man. Catherine later regrets their friendship upon discovery of Isabella's cunning and selfish behavior.

experience that Wollstonecraft constructs in *Original Stories*, in which young women acquire principles of reason by observing the faults (and virtues) of other women. And, as Stuart M. Tave explains in *Some Words of Jane Austen*, the heroine's overcoming of the figure of the conniving female (or, in Tave's terms, "the other woman") ultimately allows for the fulfillment of the quintessential Austen ending, in which

all the heroines find happy endings and they all deserve them, as each has, in one way or another, worked, suffered, learned. But if they do not get more than they deserve they often seem to arrive at, or be helped to, the happy ending by a stroke of luck, such as the sudden and fortunate removal of the other woman ... at the right moment. What seems to be more important than the sudden and fortunate event, however, because it precedes the ending again and again, in whatever manner the end is produced, is that the heroine is prepared to accept unhappiness ... She must really see it as a loss, absorb it as an irreversible fact, and then come to terms with herself and go ahead with what she must do now. (17-18)

Thus, for Austen's "happy ending" to come to fruition, the "other woman" must disappear, but not before the heroine "accept[s]" the fact that her adversary has succeeded—that she has indeed won Edward Ferrars or that she will convince Mr. Darcy to marry Miss de Bourgh. However, like Mary and Caroline in *Original Stories*,

both the Bennet and Dashwood sisters must contend with more than one "other woman" that threatens their achievement of happiness. Austen's novelistic representations of "other women" function much like Wollstonecraft's various representations of Sophy; in order for the Misses Bennet and Dashwood to achieve their desires, they, like Mary and Caroline, must overcome the greatest of feminine temptations—*becoming her*. In so doing, they serve to demonstrate the *outcome* of adhering to principles of feminine virtue as outlined in *Original Stories*, suggesting that it is the acquisition of reason (rather than accomplishments) that leads to happiness.

Austen's "other woman" characters, represented as antagonists in her novels, are much more developed than Wollstonecraft's everywomen, however. Mrs. Mason invokes *Original Stories'* everywoman characters in order to reinforce a particular didactic perspective (e.g., on truth telling or dress) that she is in the process of explaining to Mary and Caroline. These static representations of Sophy do not converse with Mary and Caroline themselves, but are objects of representation within Mrs. Mason's own "direct, unmediated discourse" (Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky" 199). Within Austen's novelistic framework, however, the "other woman" characters are represented as "speaking persons" through their own distinct discourse and therefore affect the discursive life of the other characters (Bakhtin 332). As Bakhtin explains, in an ideal context, novelistic discourse is comprised of "internally unresolved dialogues among

characters (seen as embodied points of view)...the life experience of the characters may be resolved as far as plot is concerned, but internally they remain incomplete and unresolved" (348-49). Such an effect, in turn, allows the reader to complete this "dialogue" amongst characters that remains "incomplete and unresolved" making it "half" hers (Bakhtin 345), enabling her to question or apply new word(s) into "new contexts that dialogize it" (Bakhtin 346). As embodiments of particular worldviews, Austen's "other women" take on their own ideological significance beyond mere allegorical exemplification. They are women of rank, of beauty, or of notoriety—in other words, representations of individuals that might exist in the world, and their speech and actions reflect their respective worldviews (Bakhtin 332-334). Hence, readers have the opportunity to question these worldviews and decide for themselves how to respond to them, whereas in Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories*, readers' responses are explicitly directed by Mrs. Mason, who describes her female exemplars as either good or bad examples. This is not to say that Austen does not also encourage readers to respond in certain ways to the "other women" in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. As Jan Fergus has argued, Austen deploys particular structural strategies in order to direct readers' responses. However, the novel does not *insist* upon a particular response, but invites or encourages it. Readers have the freedom to determine how they will interpret and understand the various worldviews Austen's characters represent.

#### 4.1.1 *Pride and Prejudice* as (Mis)behavior

In *Original Stories*, Mrs. Mason describes "some persons of my acquaintance, who have suffered the faults, or follies, I wish you to avoid" (384), one of whom is the cunning and deceitful Lady Sly.

Last week you [Mary and Caroline] saw Lady Sly, who came to pay me a morning visit. Did you ever see such a fine carriage, or such beautiful horses? How they pawed the ground, and displayed their rich harnesses! Her servants wore elegant liveries, and her own clothes suited the equipage. Her house is equal to her carriage; the rooms are lofty, and hung with silk; noble glasses and pictures adorn them: and the pleasure-grounds are large and well laid out; [...] yet, my young friends, this is *state* not *dignity*.

This woman has a little soul, she never attended to truth, and obtaining great part of her fortune by falsehood, it has blighted all of her enjoyments.... Her suspicious temper arises from a knowledge of her own heart, and the want of rational employments.... She is neglected by her husband, whose only motive for marrying her was to clear an incumbered estate. Her son, her only child, is undutiful; the poor never have cause to bless her; nor does she contribute to the happiness of any human being...To kill time, and drive

away the pangs of remorse, she goes from one house to another, collecting and propagating scandalous tales, to bring others on a level with herself. Even those who resemble her are afraid of her; she lives alone in the world, its good things are poisoned by her vices, and neither inspire joy nor gratitude. (385)

Emphasizing one particular facet of Sophy's overall character, her penchant for deception, Wollstonecraft demonstrates how Lady Sly's "vice" might "poison" both her family and acquaintances. In Mrs. Mason's description of her, we might also recognize the "irrational monster" that Wollstonecraft discusses in *Vindication*, who, in, her obsession with superficial attainments such as clothes and other finery "neglect[s] all the duties of life." In accordance with Wollstonecraft's general disdain for the uselessness of aristocratic women, she remarks on Lady Sly's "want of rational employments" as a leading cause of her "suspicious temper." The deceptiveness of her character as well as her obsession with worldly wealth lead her to cheat her worthy cousin out of her inheritance, as she "practiced every mean art to prejudice her aunt against her, and succeeded" (Wollstonecraft 384).

*Pride and Prejudice* deploys a similar representation of poor female education in the character of the "other woman;" she sometimes "propagates scandalous tales" in regards to the story's heroines, and sometimes altogether "poisons" their hopes of happiness. She first appears as the character of Miss Caroline

Bingley, sister to Jane Bennet's newfound love interest. Although it is eventually revealed that Mr. Darcy himself convinced Mr. Bingley to quit Netherfield and dishonor his anticipated engagement to Jane, before Darcy admits to this interference, we are introduced to the conniving women that, from the very beginning, hope to undermine any connection between the Bennets and the residents of Netherfield:

[The Bingley sisters] were in fact very fine ladies; not deficient in good humour when they were pleased, nor in the power of being agreeable where they chose it; but proud and conceited. They were rather handsome, had been educated in one of the first private seminaries in town, had a fortune of twenty thousand pounds, were in the habit of spending more than they ought, and of associating with people of rank; and were therefore in every respect entitled to think well of themselves, and meanly of others.

(Austen 11)

By describing them first as "very fine ladies," like Wollstonecraft, Austen emphasizes the relationship between wealth, rank, and a dissipated feminine disposition characterized by "pride and conceit."

Austen further elaborates Miss Caroline Bingley's feminine "vices" during the Bennet's stay at Netherfield; in addition to her habit of perpetually "thinking well of [herself]," she manipulates feminine cunning or "arts" to attract Mr. Darcy's



attention, as she takes up reading "the second volume of his [book]" for the purposes of "watching Mr. Darcy's progress through *his* book" (37) or "walk[ing] about the room" to show off her "elegant" figure (38). Miss Bingley's attempt to display her feminine 'virtues' for Darcy reveal the nature of her education; her desire to show off her "elegant" figure and her ability to "walk well" indicate that she has been schooled in various female accomplishments that might render her pleasing to Mr. Darcy. Exhibiting the jealousy and vanity that accompany an education based on pleasing men, Miss Bingley fosters prejudice against Elizabeth and employs 'mean art[s]' to discourage Mr. Darcy's interest in her. At various points, Miss Bingley "abuse[s] her as soon as she [is] out of the room. [Elizabeth's] manners were pronounced to be very bad indeed, a mixture of pride and impertinence; she had no conversation, no stile, no taste, no beauty ... Her face is too thin; her complexion has no brilliancy; and her features are not at all handsome" (24,175). Miss Bingley's willingness to resort to cunning and deceit in the interests of her selfish desires is also evidenced in her manipulation of Jane and Mr. Bingley's relationship. Although she is not the primary reason for Mr. Bingley's abandonment of Jane, she ultimately convinces Jane of his indifference. Indeed, her affected politeness in writing Jane to explain their quick removal to London only serves to convince Elizabeth of what she already suspected, as she suggests that "we are not rich enough, or grand enough for them; and she is the more anxious to get Miss

Darcy for her brother, from the notion that when there has been one intermarriage, she may have less trouble in achieving a second" (Austen 81).

Yet, Miss Bingley's (mis)behavior resembles Elizabeth's own peculiar faults of "thinking well of" herself, propagating "scandalous tales," and allowing her preconceived notions regarding particular people and situations determine her judgments—in short, her pride and prejudice. Although Elizabeth, as we later discover, accurately represents the character of Miss Bingley in her assessment, Jane questions Elizabeth's hasty assumption, suggesting that "they are very pleasing when you converse with them ... and I am much mistaken if we shall not find a very charming neighbor in her" (11). Thinking to herself, Elizabeth recognizes Miss Bingley as an "'insolent girl,'" imprudently refusing to consider Miss Bingley's caveat that she should not "give implicit confidence to all [Mr. Wickham's] assertions." Harboring "resentment against [Wickham's] enemies," Elizabeth overlooks the possibility that he could be deceiving her, and thus defames Darcy by passing Wickham's 'scandalous tale' on to Jane (65, 58). Elizabeth shares Miss Bingley's capacity for meanness, as she thinks snidely of Miss Bingley's ruined hopes of marrying Mr. Darcy: "This information made Elizabeth smile ... Vain indeed must be all her attentions, vain and useless her affection for his sister and her praise of himself, if her were already destined to another" (Austen 57). Her initial assessment of Miss De Bourgh is equally unforgiving,

as she allows her dislike of Darcy to color her perception: "'I like her appearance,' ... 'She looks sickly and cross.—Yes she will do for him [Darcy] very well. She will make him a proper wife'" (106). Thus, Elizabeth's anger towards Mr. Bingley's "unfeeling sisters" and "overpowering friend" (88) leads her to assume the very attitudes and behaviors that she despises in Miss Bingley — feeling "entitled" as a victim of their "pride and conceit," "to think well of [herself], and meanly of others" (11).

Before Elizabeth achieves happiness with Darcy, she must turn her sense of victimization and meanness towards the "other woman" into a learning experience for herself. Austen's "other woman" ultimately enables Elizabeth to overcome the temptation to assume her faults. This overcoming takes place—not in regards to Miss Bingley—but in regards to a more dangerous manifestation of Lady Sly, Lady Catherine De Bourgh. Recalling Elizabeth's initial assessment of the Bingley sisters, she describes Lady Catherine as "authoritative," "self-importan[t]," and "gratified by ... excessive admiration," with an "air [that] was not conciliating, nor was her manner of receiving them, such as to make her visitors forget their inferior rank" (Austen 108). Like Miss Bingley, Lady Catherine stoops to even "meaner arts" to attempt to undermine a marriage between Darcy and Elizabeth, proposing that a match between Darcy and her daughter would be preferable, as "[Elizabeth] would not wish to quit the sphere, in which [she has] been brought up" (232). Lady Catherine's attempt to "try," Elizabeth, however, actually provides the occasion for Elizabeth

to exercise her reason; rather than developing a prejudice towards the woman that intends to undermine her (as she does Miss Bingley), in her conversation with Lady Catherine, Elizabeth "attend[s] strictly to truth," thus, in *Original Stories*' terms, enacting feminine "virtue" (Wollstonecraft 384):

I am not to be intimidated into anything so wholly unreasonable. Your ladyship wants Mr. Darcy to marry your daughter; but would my giving you the wished-for promise, make *their* marriage at all more probable? ... Allow me to say, Lady Catherine, that the arguments with which you have supported this extraordinary application, have been as frivolous as the application was ill-judged. You have widely mistaken my character, if you think I can be worked on by such persuasions as these. (233)

Assessing Lady Catherine's "mean arts" by principles of reason, making reference to her flawed "arguments" and "judg[ment]" rather than her inferior character and behavior, Elizabeth resists the temptation of *becoming her*. Rather than perpetrating 'scandalous tales' about Lady Catherine's impertinence, she recognizes how "the other woman" has played a role in her present state of happiness, acknowledging that "Lady Catherine has been of infinite use" in bringing Darcy and herself to their "present good understanding" of one another's affections (239, 249). Ultimately kinder to Lady Catherine than her own nephew, "by Elizabeth's persuasion, [Darcy] was prevailed on to overlook the

offence [of her "abusive" remarks], and seek a reconciliation" after which Lady Catherine's "resentment gave way, either to her affection for him, or her curiosity to see how his wife conducted herself; and she condescended to wait on them at Pemberley" (Austen 254). Elizabeth eventually even speaks well of the conniving Miss Bingley, who, although "deeply mortified by Darcy's marriage," "dropt all her resentment ... and paid off every arrear of civility to Elizabeth" (253). Like the female-centered pedagogy of *Original Stories*, in which young women learn from those "who have suffered" through certain "faults" (384), *Pride and Prejudice* reinforces the importance of "the other woman" in the heroine's development of reason, virtue, and, ultimately, happiness.

Although having more reason to act "mean[ly]" in response to Caroline Bingley's ill use of her, Jane also chooses to adhere to principles of virtue in her manner of dealing with "the other woman." However, in her desire to cultivate a friendship with Miss Bingley, Jane also demonstrates the dangers of attempting to form a relationship with her. Like the debauched everywomen in *Original Stories*, Austen's "other women" may become acquaintances but never friends, given that "it is impossible to form a friendship without making truth the basis" (Wollstonecraft 348). Refusing to consider Elizabeth's assessment of her character, Jane falls prey to Miss Bingley's cunning ability to affect sincere friendship; Jane finds it easier to believe that Mr. Bingley prefers Miss Darcy than to accept the possibility that

Miss Bingley has deceived her, stating "Caroline is incapable of willfully deceiving anyone; and all that I can hope in this case is, that she is deceived herself" (Austen 81). Although Jane insists that their quick removal to London "must be [Mr. Bingley's] own doing," as Mr. Bingley is "unaffectedly modest," and incapable of acting "on his own judgment" (Austen 242), he is, like Jane, easily "duped by" (Austen 100) the other woman, and it is Miss Bingley who writes to confirm that they will not return. Even when Caroline writes a second letter to report "of their all being settled in London for the winter," and "Miss Darcy's praise occupie[s] the chief of it," Jane is still unwilling, despite Elizabeth's admonition, to believe that "his sisters [have] influence[d] him" (Austen 92). In the belief that she can trust Caroline's word, Jane fails to take the initiative to secure Mr. Bingley's regard, thus allowing "the other woman" to successfully undermine their relationship. *Pride and Prejudice* thereby illustrates the power of influence that "the other woman" might have over an incredulous young lady, as Miss Bingley—not Mr. Bingley—sets the terms for Jane's courtship.

However, like Elizabeth, Jane is obliged to confront her own faults in Miss Bingley—the "air" of "indifferen[ce]" and lack of "sentiment" that led Darcy to doubt her attachment to Bingley (130). Indifference is a manifestation of pride, as Elizabeth remarks on the Bingley sisters' "indifference towards Jane when not immediately before them" (24), and while visiting London, Jane recognizes (in Miss Bingley's cold "inattention") that she

was "deceived in Miss Bingley's regard for me" (99), as it "was very evident that she had no pleasure in [her visit ... and] said not a word of wishing to see me again" (99-100). The effect that Miss Bingley's "inattention" has on Jane is enough to convince her to "continue the acquaintance no longer" (99), much like the effect that Jane's own air of indifference has on Mr. Bingley. Although Jane doesn't directly confront "the other woman," she takes care to avoid her faults, eschewing scandal and meanness in favor of "banish[ing] every painful thought, and think[ing] of only what will make me happy, your affection, and the invariable kindness of my dear uncle and aunt" (Austen 99). On course to her "happy ending," here we see Jane, despite the "duplicity" of the other woman, "com[ing] to terms with herself and go[ing] ahead with what she must do now" (Tave 18). And, hereafter Jane relinquishes her earlier "composure of temper and ... uniform cheerfulness of manner" meant to hide her feelings from "discover[y]" (Austen 15)—a species of pride meant to "guard her from the suspicions of the impertinent" (15). When Bingley arrives with renewed determination to court Jane, Elizabeth observes that "after this day, Jane said no more of her indifference" (225), and even Darcy suggests that he was "convinced of her affection" (242). Therefore, her relationship with "the other woman," although failed as a friendship, has become a learning experience for Jane. And like Elizabeth, Jane finally overlooks Miss Bingley's former "inattention" and "duplicity" (Austen 99). In response to Miss Bingley's letter of

"congratulations," "though feeling no reliance on her, [Jane] could not help writing her a much kinder answer than she knew was deserved" (250).

Reflecting the female-centered pedagogy of *Original Stories*, the Bennet sisters' experiences with Miss Bingley and Lady Catherine enable them to amend their own peculiar faults, while recognizing the importance of avoiding hers. *Pride and Prejudice's* didactic approach is not constructed to *impose* its message upon readers, however. Although readers are encouraged to question the behavior of Miss Bingley and Lady Catherine because they make life difficult for the story's heroines, these "other women" are more than mere didactic tools constructed to reveal the effects of poor female education; they are representative of a particular worldview—that of the aristocratic or upper-class 'snob'—and therefore take on a social significance beyond the novelistic context. Undoubtedly, certain of Austen's late 18<sup>th</sup> century and 19<sup>th</sup> century readers identified with their plight in attempting to 'save' their male relatives from unworthy marriages to women of lower birth. *Pride and Prejudice* also invites readers to consider these women—not as rivals to be thwarted—but as an enduring part of the heroines' lives. Elizabeth and Jane recognize "the other woman," not as a friend or even an enemy, but as someone they must graciously accept as part of their families or social circles. Like Lady Sly in *Original Stories*, "the other woman" in *Pride and Prejudice* does not experience redemption; there is the possibility of reform (in Miss Bingley's



newfound "civility" and the "[giving] way" of Lady Catherine's "resentment"), but there is neither a full elaboration nor a final confirmation of it. Having reconciled begrudgingly, or only to "retain the right of visiting at Pemberley" (Austen 253), she remains 'at large' so that she might serve as the impetus for another young lady's learning experience, or as an ever-present reminder to Elizabeth and Jane of the kind of woman they should never become.

#### **4.1.2 Feminist Pedagogy as *Sense* Vs. *Sensibility***

In *Sense and Sensibility*, the Dashwood sisters undergo a similar learning experience, as they are imposed upon by a variety of "other women" who threaten to undermine their happiness. The Miss Dashwoods must endure the condescending airs of the "narrow-minded" Mrs. John Dashwood, who, indulging her own selfishness (3-4), 'talks her husband down' from the three thousand pounds he has determined to give his stepmother and sisters, convincing him that "your father had no idea of your giving them money at all" (7 ). Mrs. John Dashwood's "ungracious behaviour" in "install[ing] herself [as] mistress of Norland" (3-4) requires that the Dashwoods leave Norland and take up a residence that suits their income (8). Not only does she serve to undermine the Dashwoods' financial and domestic stability, but Mrs. John Dashwood also functions, like Miss Bingley, to interfere in Elinor's relationship with Edward Ferrars. In the interests of

maintaining "her brother's great expectations," Mrs. John Dashwood informs Mrs. Dashwood of her mother's "resolution that both her sons should marry well, and of the danger attending any young woman who attempted to draw him in" (14). Mrs. John Dashwood's conniving attempt to manipulate Edward (who is, like Mr. Bingley, easily controlled by the women in his life (13-14)), is mirrored by his mother's equally strong disregard for any woman without "a great fortune or high rank" (13). Elinor's relationship to Edward is further complicated by the 'mean arts' employed by Lucy Steele in confiding her "great secret" to Elinor regarding her supposed engagement (86-87). A woman "capable of the utmost meanness of wanton ill-nature" (251), Lucy Steele recalls *Original Stories*' exemplar of poor female education, Lady Sly, as she takes advantage of Elinor's "excellent heart" (3) as a means of securing a husband and a fortune.

This interference on the part of "the other woman" is what ultimately allows for the Dashwood sisters to "work," "suffer," "learn," and eventually "come to terms with [themselves]" (Tave 17-18). Unlike the women of *Pride and Prejudice*, however, these representations of poor female education serve to underscore Elinor—not as a woman in need of improvement—but as a paradigm of feminine virtue, who, by example, must rescue Marianne from suffering from the same condition as another of Wollstonecraft's debauched everywomen, Jane Fretful. As Jan Fergus suggests in *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel*, *Sense and Sensibility* is "unpalatable to those critics" who "feel that Elinor's 'sense'

should be exposed as deficient, or as equally in need of correction or modification ... Such criticism assumes that some middle ground is reached between Elinor and Marianne, which involves the assumption that Elinor needs correction, usually that she is in some way unfeeling at first and learns in the course of the action to taste 'the values of sensibility'" (41). However, the female rational moralists often incorporated equally virtuous counterparts to offer an alternative to their negative exemplars. As an inheritor of that tradition, *Sense and Sensibility* deploys an exemplar of female rationality and virtue as a woman of "Sense," and therefore her "behaviour" is "from the beginning, considerate and right" (Fergus 41). To offer an alternative to the "faults, or follies" of Lady Sly, Mrs. Mason introduces Mary and Caroline to Mrs. Trueman's "mode of conduct." In contrast to Lady Sly's cunning and deceit, Mrs. Trueman

appears superior to her neighbours, who call her *Gentlewoman*; indeed every gesture shews an accomplished and dignified mind, that relies on itself, when deprived of the fortune which contributed to polish and give it consequence ... Her virtues claim respect, and the practice of them engrosses her thoughts ... Not like many women who are eager to set off their persons to the best advantage ... Mrs. Trueman's conduct is just the reverse; she tries to avoid singularity, for she does not wish to disgust

the generality; but it is her family, her friends,  
whom she studies to please. (386, 410)

*Original Stories'* paragon of feminine virtue, unlike Lady Sly, boasts a "dignified mind" rather than fortune and, because she is "good-natured," she "claim[s] respect" from family, friends, and acquaintances. Rather than attempting to indulge her own selfishness, Mrs. Trueman "is ever exercising benevolence and love" (436). Mrs. Trueman not only exercises these "virtues" herself, but works to instill them in her children as well, as she "teaches, in the tenderest and most persuasive manner, important truths and elegant accomplishments" (386), thus "add[ing] to the innocent enjoyments of [her] children, and improv[ing] them at the same time" (436). As an ideal woman of virtue, Mrs. Trueman obtains "accomplishments," not for the sake of "vanity," but to "amuse those [she] love[s]," the cultivation of which comes second to the "joy resulting from doing good" (436). Like Mrs. Trueman, Elinor, as the woman of "sense," essays to avoid "singularity;" she does not seek to arouse pity for her own misfortunes, but hopes to "improve" those she loves, as she

possessed a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment, which qualified her, though only nineteen, to be the counselor of her mother, and enabled her to frequently counteract, to the advantage of them all, that eagerness of mind in Mrs Dashwood which must generally have led to imprudence. She had an excellent heart;-her disposition was affectionate, and her

feelings were strong; but she knew how to govern them:  
it was a knowledge which her mother had yet to learn,  
and which one of her sisters had resolved never to be  
taught. (Austen 3)

Because Elinor, unlike Elizabeth or Jane in *Pride and Prejudice*, is established early on as possessing *all* qualities of the "rational woman," she is more significantly tried by "the other woman," as she cannot revert to scandal or meanness in response to the cruelty she endures. She must, like Mrs. Trueman, set an example of feminine virtue for those around her, especially her sister, who "had resolved never to be taught." In response to Mr. John Dashwood's "ungracious[ness]," she "induced her [mother] first to reflect on the propriety of going" (3), and assisted her in finding a house that was not "too large for their income" (8). Anticipating the condescension of Edward Ferrar's mother in respect to her being "only the daughter of a private gentleman" (256), Elinor puts an end to Marianne's "conjecture[]" of their engagement, or her tendency to imagine that "to wish was to hope, and to hope was to expect," emphasizing instead that "there would be many difficulties in his way, if he were to wish to marry a woman who had not either a great fortune or high rank" (Austen 13). When confronted with Lucy's confidence regarding her engagement to Edward, Elinor later explains to Marianne "My promise to Lucy, obliged me to be secret. I owed it to her ... and I owed it to my family and friends, not to create in them a solicitude about me, which it could not be in my power to

satisfy" (179). Like the benevolent Mrs. Trueman, Elinor sacrifices scandal for benevolence, and does so in the interests of "spar[ing] ["others"] from knowing how much [she] felt" (Austen 179). She even agrees to perform "a most agreeable office" on the part of Colonel Brandon, who has made arrangements for Edward and Lucy to reside at his parsonage (Austen 197-98).

Elinor serves as an example to Marianne, who, although "sensible and clever," was "eager in everything; her sorrows, joys, could have no moderation. She was generous, amiable, interesting; she was everything but prudent" (3-4). In *Some Words of Jane Austen*, Stuart M. Tave elaborates on the "insensible" nature of Marianne's character, remarking on her "'coldness'" towards others with "difference of taste from herself" suggesting that "she gave her affections to a man who was not what she thought he was, not a man of sensibility but a man selfish, cold, and hardhearted, because she herself was too much like him ... For all her eager receptivity to nature, to poetry, to music, to emotion, for all her responsive ecstasy, Marianne does not know what is happening around her" (89-90). Tave recognizes Marianne's selfishness as a critique of the conventional late 18<sup>th</sup> century understanding of sensibility as "a carefully cultivated loss of control" (Tave 75). The type of sensibility that Austen critiques—an indulgence of unrestrained feeling that leads to "violence" and behavior rivaling that of a "spoiled three-year-old" (Tave 80)—reflects Wollstonecraft's critique of women unable to temper passion with reason, represented in *Original*

*Stories'* exemplar of poor female education, Jane Fretful. At the beginning, we are made aware that Marianne's passionate indulgence is actually encouraged by her mother, as "Elinor saw, with concern, the excess of her sister's sensibility; but by Mrs. Dashwood it was valued and cherished. They encouraged each other now in the violence of their affliction. The agony of grief which overpowered them at first, was voluntarily renewed, was sought for, was created again and again" (4). Representative of the problems inherent in an education that fails to emphasize reason as a way of restraining passion, Marianne is a version of Jane Fretful, whose "weak mother would not allow her to be contradicted on any occasion. The child had some tenderness of heart; but so accustomed was she to see every thing give way to her humour, that she imagined the world was only made for her" (381). Jane Fretful's "continual passions weakened her constitution" (381), rendering her susceptible to "disappointment," as "something always disconcerted her; the horses went too fast, or too slow; the dinner was ill-dressed, or, some of the company contradicted her" (382). As Tave argues, "Marianne judges others' motives by the immediate effects of their actions on herself" (89); similarly, Jane Fretful thinks only of how the world affects her, "venting her ill-humour on those who depended on her" (381-382). Marianne's selfishness is clearly exemplified in her behavior following Willoughby's departure from Barton. Inconsiderate of the fact that her mother and sister were eager to understand the cause of her suffering,

Marianne keeps to herself, "and though her family were most anxiously attentive to her comfort," "[s]he avoided the looks of all of them" (54-55). Rather than seeking her family's consolation, she courts a "violent oppression of spirits" (55).

The evening passed off in equal indulgence of feeling. She played over every favorite song that she had been used to play to Willoughby, every air in which their voices had been oftenest joined, and sat the instrument gazing on every line of music that he had written out for her, till her heart was so heavy that no farther sadness could be gained; and this nourishment of grief was every day applied. She spent whole hours at the piano-forté alternatively singing and crying; her voice often totally suspended by her tears ... Such violence of affliction indeed could not be supported forever; it sunk within a few days into a calmer melancholy; but these employments, to which she daily recurred, her solitary walks and silent meditations, still produced occasional effusions or sorrow as lively as ever. (55)

Having no "rational employments" to occupy her mind (Wollstonecraft 385), Marianne seems to thrive on "disappointment," nursing her "melancholy" and "sorrow," seeking it out in familiar activities she enjoyed with Willoughby. When Elinor suggests that her mother might be "direct" with Marianne, and in the interests of "knowing the real state of the affair,"



that she "'ask Marianne at once' ... 'whether she is or is not engaged to Willoughby?,'" Mrs Dashwood refuses, fearing that she might "distress" Marianne. Thus, Mrs. Dashwood enables and, by her inaction, encourages Marianne's passionate "indulgence," as "common sense, common care, common prudence, were all sunk in Mrs. Dashwood's romantic delicacy" (56). Marianne's "continual passions" persist as the extent of Willoughby's deception unfolds, and she believes everyone, even Elinor, to be incapable of understanding her, and "she can only exclaim how easy it is 'for those who have no sorrow of their own to talk of exertion'" (Tave 108).

On the verge, however, of losing herself to this indulgence, Elinor rescues her from the fate of those like Jane Fretful, whose "peevish temper, preyed on her impaired constitution. ... and she hastened her end ... Her lifeless countenance displayed the marks of convulsive anger" (Wollstonecraft 382). Like Mrs. Trueman, Elinor eventually inspires the capacity for reason in Marianne, not by what she says, since Marianne will have "no comforts," and "no opening for consolation" (125), but by becoming an exemplar within her own—and quite similar—experience of unrequited love. When it became necessary for Elinor to "undeceive" Marianne in regards to Edward's engagement to Lucy, as well as the fact that she had known it for "four months," Marianne is astonished, having accused Elinor of "hav[ing] no grief," and therefore "no idea of what [she] suffer[ed]" (125, 177). Elinor reveals the nature of

her own "suffer[ing]," in which Edward's engagement to Lucy "was in a manner forced on me by the very person herself, whose prior engagement ruined all my prospects, and told me, I thought with triumph" (180), and explains her promise to "avoid giving any hint of the truth," as well as her desire to avoid "mak[ing] you and my mother most unhappy" (179). Like Mary and Caroline's "praise" of Mrs. Trueman's "good natured" conduct, upon recognizing the "merit" with which Elinor has conducted herself, Marianne begins to see reason, exclaiming "How barbarous I have been to you!—you, who have been my only comfort, who have borne with me in all my misery, who have seemed to be only suffering for me!—Is this my gratitude!—Is this the only return I can make you?" (Austen 180). In response to Elinor's willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of her "family and friends," "no reparation could be too much for [Marianne] to make" (Austen 180). Although, as both Stuart Tave and Jan Fergus observe, Marianne does not immediately convert her (again) overly-emotional self-derision into a change in worldview, Elinor provides her with a model to live by, and, following her illness and time "to reflect," Marianne suggests that she "compare[s] [her] conduct" "with what it ought to have been; I compare it with yours" (236). And, by the end, Elinor's influence is clear in Marianne's newfound conviction, in which "[t]he future must be my proof. I have laid down my plan, and if I am capable of adhering to it—my feelings shall be governed and my temper improved. They shall no longer worry others, nor torture myself.

I shall now live solely for my family. [...] As for Willoughby—to say that I shall soon or that I shall ever forget him, would be idle. His remembrance can be overcome by no change of circumstances or opinions. But it shall be regulated, it shall be checked by religion, by reason, by constant employment" (Austen 237-238). Thus, by Elinor's "example" (237), Marianne establishes "religion," "reason," and "constant employment" as her present (and future) objectives. She brings this objective to fruition by marrying a man of "goodness" with a "fond attachment to herself," as Austen elaborates

Marianne Dashwood was born to an extraordinary fate. She was born to discover the falsehood of her own opinions, and to counteract, by her conduct, her most favourite maxims. She was born to overcome an affection formed so late in life as at seventeen, and with no sentiment superior to strong esteem and lively friendship, voluntarily to give her hand to another!—and *that* other, a man who had suffered no less than herself under the event of a former attachment, whom, two years before, she had considered too old to be married ...But so it was. Instead of falling a sacrifice to an irresistible passion, as once she had fondly flattered herself with expecting ... in her more calm and sober judgment she had determined on,—she found herself at nineteen, submitting to new attachments, entering on new duties, placed in a new home, a wife,

the mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village. (259-60)

However, although Marianne's marriage serves to exemplify her more rational worldview, her "new attachment" is subordinated to another in the last lines of the novel—the relationship she shares with Elinor: "And among the merits and the happiness of Elinor and Marianne, let it not be ranked as the least considerable, that though sisters, and living almost within sight of each other, they could live without disagreement between themselves, or producing coolness between their husbands" (261). What is of greatest consequence is the girls' ability to maintain "constant communication" with one another; if Marianne loses her more "sober judgment," Elinor is "within sight" to assist her. And, for Elinor, having always considered the happiness of her family even before her own—for all her efforts—now has the reward of experiencing both.

*Sense and Sensibility's* representation of female-centered pedagogy closely resembles the didactic structure of *Original Stories* in its incorporation of an exemplar of feminine virtue that must 'save' other women from the effects of their bad behavior. This construction has, as Jan Fergus argues, rendered *Sense and Sensibility* the "least [appreciated] of all Austen's novels," since the novel seems "'extremely rigid'" and Elinor "priggish and self-righteous'" (40)—in other words, the novel seems too much like conventional didactic novels that feature

static exemplary characters.<sup>46</sup> Yet, Marianne and Elinor are not merely exemplars of 'good' and 'bad' female education; Marianne is, as Andrew Wright suggests (quoted by Fergus above) a "loveable" character; she is attractive, silly, and insensible to her bad behavior like most 'little sisters' are. Unlike Mrs. Trueman, Elizabeth exhibits an emotional life that is carefully controlled by her own "exertion" (Tave 98), feeling no less than Marianne when circumstances warrant such feeling. Hence, *Sense and Sensibility* presents two recognizable worldviews in Elinor and Marianne with which readers might identify and struggle—that of the 'older and wiser' sister and the wayward younger sibling. As long as there are sisters, *Sense and Sensibility* will maintain its social significance and, therefore, will remain (for some) a pleasurable reading experience.

Both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* reflect Wollstonecraft's female-centered pedagogy, as they incorporate representations of poor female education, who, as Austen's "other women," serve to test the virtues of the Bennet and Dashwood sisters. As a result of the "other woman's" interference, Austen's young heroines must learn through experience, thus allowing for the cultivation of reason, and eventually, the achievement of their "happy ending." However, these "happy endings" do not belong to the heroine alone; Elizabeth must carry

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<sup>46</sup> As Jane Spencer argues, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa* are examples of the perfect heroines that pervaded the didactic novel. Writers in the reformed heroine tradition sought to undermine these static representations of women.

on her family obligations both to Miss Bingley and Lady Catherine, and Elinor is "within sight" of Marianne, and now daughter to Mrs. Ferrars and sister-in-law to Lucy. Like Mrs. Mason's "farewell" to the hitherto "shamefully ignorant" Mary and Caroline, which asks that "when you think of your friend, observe her precepts; and let the recollection of my affection give additional weight to the truths which I have endeavored to instill; and, to reward my care, let me hear that you love and practise virtue" (Wollstonecraft 449-50), these texts reveal the ongoing nature of maintaining feminine virtue, as a young woman might ultimately find the "the other woman" in her mother, her sister, or even herself.

## 5.0 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY FEMINIST PEDAGOGY AS 'SELF MAKING:' THE OTHER WOMAN AS SACRIFICE IN *JANE EYRE*.

Like the work of Wollstonecraft and Austen, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* borrows from earlier didactic traditions as a way of establishing its feminist project. In her appropriation of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Brontë constructs a feminist pedagogical approach that reimagines everywoman characters who help the heroine establish an identity apart from the one imposed on her by her Aunt at Gateshead—the "mad cat" and "ugly toad" who was considered "less than a servant" by the Reed family (Brontë 9). In further developing Wollstonecraft's "Sophy" or Austen's "other woman" as characters in novelistic discourse, Brontë's *Jane Eyre* more explicitly emphasizes the personal degradation and ignominy that women suffer as a result of frivolous educational regimens based on feminine 'accomplishments;' *Jane Eyre* imagines a variety of plausible outcomes for such a woman, the most drastic of which is death. While Wollstonecraft and Austen incorporate the other woman ultimately to convey the importance of female relationships as part of a female-centered didacticism, Charlotte Brontë's 19<sup>th</sup> century representation of this 18<sup>th</sup> century feminist topos treats the other woman as an expendable

character whose purpose is to teach the heroine that her sense of identity and selfhood is the correct one.

Emerging at a time in which "imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English" (Spivak 240), Charlotte Brontë's most influential novel *Jane Eyre* depicts the heroine as an adventurer in a "wide" world "go[ing] forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life" (Brontë 72). As a quest for female individuality, *Jane Eyre* adapts Bunyan's moral tale of downfall and redemption, a comparatively individual pilgrimage that posits the protagonist, Christian (seeking the Celestial City, Kingdom of God) against the world (evil). As Heather Glen suggests in "'Dreadful to Me: *Jane Eyre* and History," *Jane Eyre* resembles "puritan autobiography or evangelical tract, [in which] the social world appears as a place of solitary pilgrimage, and the self as radical isolate, pursuing its own separate path to its own particular end" (145).<sup>47</sup> Whereas Wollstonecraft and Austen inscribe their everywoman characters into a female-centered world that emphasizes the value of forgiveness and forbearance of other's faults, *Jane Eyre* appropriates the larger didactic framework of *Pilgrim's Progress*, thus establishing an

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<sup>47</sup> Heather Glen reads *Jane Eyre* in relation to a late 18<sup>th</sup> century Evangelical didactic tradition that includes Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773) and Hannah Moore's *Cheap Repository Tracts*, marking the text's relationship to a "distinctive pedagogy which had developed out of the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century and which by the nineteenth was enshrined in schools" (132). I am reading *Jane Eyre* as a feminist appropriation of the puritan tradition that Glen addresses here.



antagonistic relationship between Jane and those who threaten her journey towards selfhood. Going the way of Bunyan's unbelievers who attempt to undermine Christian's quest, the other women in *Jane Eyre* are sacrificed so that the heroine might complete her pilgrimage, coming to the penultimate moment in which she "penetrate[s] very near a Mighty Spirit" (358). *Jane Eyre* portrays feminine coming of age as an individual and introspective process; therefore, the "other woman" becomes the heroine's "antipode" (Brontë 265) and her rival.<sup>48</sup>

While Gilbert and Gubar acknowledge Brontë's appropriation of Bunyan's "mythic quest plot," or Jane's "progress from one significantly named place to another," as well as her use of allegorical names and certain "significant redefinitions of Bunyan" at the end of the novel (336, 342, 370), they overlook *Jane Eyre's* appropriation of the text's didactic strategies in favor of emphasizing its "rebellious feminism."<sup>49</sup> They suggest

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<sup>48</sup> For further commentary on how *Jane Eyre* represents "feminist individualism in the age of imperialism" see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" in *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 (Autumn 1985): 243-61.

<sup>49</sup> In their groundbreaking reading of *Jane Eyre* in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane's Progress" from *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggest that Jane's story might be characterized as a "female *Bildungsroman*," in which she "overcomes" the "difficulties [of] Everywoman in a patriarchal society" (338-339). In light of the influence of postcolonial criticism, many critics have problematized Gilbert and Gubar's reading of *Jane Eyre* as representative of "rebellious feminism," especially in regards to their characterization of Bertha as a psychological extension of Jane, or her "dark double." (See Jenny Sharpe's *Allegories of Empire* and Susan Meyer's "'Indian Ink:': Colonialism and the Figurative Strategy of *Jane Eyre*" in *Imperialism at Home*.) I call Gilbert and Gubar's claim regarding *Jane Eyre* as exhibiting "rebellious feminism" into question as well, noting the ways in which Jane's success as feminist individualist necessitates the sacrifice of other women.

that Bronte has forgone the "devout substance" of Bunyan's moralizing tale—an argument that does resonate with the moments in which Jane expresses her desires to "go where there was life and movement" (75) or to "reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen" (Brontë 93), and she ultimately spurns a man of God in favor of a (once) dissipated man of wealth. However, *Jane Eyre* both alludes to and comments on Christian doctrine as an important part of Jane's journey.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, various moments in the text suggest that Brontë has not so much dispensed with the "devout substance" of *Pilgrim's Progress* as reinterpreted it from a feminist perspective. Jane decides to "keep the law given by God" rather than give in to Rochester's pleas that she remain with him as a mistress, takes comfort in "His efficiency to save what He has made" when confronted with spending the night alone in the wilderness, and she "entreat[s] of Heaven" how to respond to St. John's proposal of marriage (270, 276, 357) before she mysteriously hears Rochester's voice calling her. James Diedrick suggests that "in the quasi-providential world of *Jane Eyre*, God seems to intervene in Jane's life repeatedly, whether to aid her in her quest for fulfillment...or to protect her moral integrity" (24). *Jane Eyre* integrates these seemingly incongruent discourses of puritan morality and feminine individualism, the interplay of which

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<sup>50</sup> For further elaboration on how *Jane Eyre* deploys different versions Christianity and the Bible, see James Diedrick's "*Jane Eyre* and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," Susan VanZanten Gallagher's "*Jane Eyre* and Christianity," and Keith A. Jenkins's "*Jane Eyre*: Charlotte Brontë's New Bible" in *Approaches to Teaching Brontë's Jane Eyre*.

functions to redefine the meaning of Christianity from a 19<sup>th</sup> century feminist perspective. Brontë's redefinition involves generating a fiction in which the heroine's desire and God's will are one and the same, in which other women are (appropriately) sacrificed so that Jane—who is "poor, obscure, plain, and little"—may live out the feminist dream, becoming "a beauty" in Mr. Rochester's "eyes" (Brontë 216, 220).

There has been no attempt to link the marginalized female figure of Bertha, often addressed in postcolonial criticism, to the other females that are sacrificed in *Jane Eyre*. Postcolonial critics such as Gayatri Spivak have focused on how the process of constructing "the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction" necessitated the "violence" (243) perpetrated against Rochester's (supposedly) mad Creole wife, but, like feminist critics who argue that we might read *Jane Eyre* as a feminist tract *despite* its exclusion of the "'native female,'" she overlooks Bertha's relationship to the text's other marginalized female figures. *Jane Eyre's* making of the "militant female subject" calls for the sacrifice of other women who threaten to undermine the heroine's sense of identity, what Adrienne Rich has called her "*Jane Eyre-ity*." *Jane Eyre's* representation of the other woman as "sacrifice" reveals both the possibilities for (the feminist individualist) and the limitations of (at the expense of another woman's happiness) of a female-centered didacticism.

## 5.1 "A NEW SERVITUDE:" THE VILLAGE SCHOOLMISTRESS AS FEMINIST INDIVIDUALIST

In its deployment of a variety of generic forms and strategies (i.e., romance, gothic, bildungsroman), *Jane Eyre* is representative of numerous 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century textual traditions, and as Gilbert and Gubar have remarked, also accessible to readers, as "we tend today to think of *Jane Eyre* as...the archetypal scenario for all those mildly thrilling romantic encounters between a scowling Byronic hero (who owns a gloomy mansion) and a trembling heroine (who can't quite figure out the mansion's floor plan)" (337). Despite the fact that scenes of women teaching and learning comprise a substantial portion of the novel's action and function to shape the terms of its discourse, however, there has been no attempt to read *Jane Eyre* as a text that emphasizes the importance of women as mentors and teachers of young girls, or as an appropriation of women's didactic writing from the mid to late 18<sup>th</sup> century that also represents women in this way.<sup>51</sup> *Jane Eyre* has been read as

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<sup>51</sup>James Diedrick points to a possible relationship between *Jane Eyre* and Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. He argues that "no attempt has been made...to link...the terms of [*Jane Eyre*'s] feminism in general, to a tradition of feminist discourse that originated fifty-five years before *Jane Eyre* appeared, when Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*" (22-23). Diedrick argues that "both writers recognize that...society seeks to prevent women from fully exercising their reason and developing their virtue" by means of "the traditional 'separation of virtues' doctrine that assumes different mental and moral capacities in men and women" (23, 25). Furthermore, he suggests that "in both texts, God empowers women to exercise their own moral judgment apart from male expectations" (24). Although I agree

representative of the Victorian "governess novel" which emerged in the 1830s in response to "the nineteenth-century anxiety concerning middle-class female employment in general, and governess work in particular," an anxiety which also led to the publication of manuals for governesses and much debate in the press. As Cecilia Lecaros suggests in *The Victorian Governess Novel*, this genre incorporated "themes like sudden impoverishment, paternal insufficiency, and conflicts with nouveaux riches employers" into "plots [that] focused on the working conditions and social position of the governess heroine" (Lecaros). The "governess novel" evolves, however, from this 18<sup>th</sup> century didactic form that emerged with Sarah Fielding's *The Governess; or, The Little Female Academy* (1749),<sup>52</sup> representing a female-centered learning experience overseen by a learned female pedagogue or mentor<sup>53</sup> in which "portrayals of governesses have a clearly didactic purpose and present highly appreciated teachers" (Lecaros). While *Jane Eyre* does adhere to various conventions of

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with Diedrick's linking of *Jane Eyre* to Wollstonecraft's feminism, I will make more specific connections between the structural features of *Jane Eyre* and Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories*.

<sup>52</sup> Like *Original Stories*, *The Governess* describes female pupils' progress towards virtue; however, in *The Governess*, the eldest girl (rather than the governess herself) instructs by means of "Fable and Moral" (45) and the girls learn from one another through their own "life stories, highlighting the various faults that marked their behavior before coming to Mrs. Teachum's school" (Ward 33).

<sup>53</sup> The following texts exemplify how women represented themselves as pedagogues in 18<sup>th</sup> century conduct books and early forms of the governess novel. Some, like Fielding's *The Governess*, are educational novels, others take the form of dialogues or a series of letters: *Mentoria* (Ann Murry 1778), *Original Stories from Real Life* (Mary Wollstonecraft 1788), *Anecdotes of Mary; or, The Good Governess* (H.S. 1795), *Letters on Subjects of Importance to the Happiness of Young Females, Addresses by a Governess to her Pupils* (Helena Whitford 1799), and "The Good French Governess" (Maria Edgeworth 1801).

the governess novel in its representation of orphanhood and sudden impoverishment, the text more closely resembles the earlier didactic tradition of woman as pedagogue. Unlike the culture of the governess novel, Brontë does not represent the governess position as one of victimization in order to comment on the "working conditions and social position of the governess heroine," but rather emphasizes that becoming a governess (and female education in general) enables Jane to achieve feminist individuality. By demonstrating the possibilities inherent in taking on the role of pedagogue, *Jane Eyre* functions much like 18<sup>th</sup> century texts in which women as teachers/mentors show "how women can school themselves toward self-command and psychic self-sufficiency, and [how] women can help shape the world about them" (Myers 201-203). And, like Brontë's appropriation of Bunyan's mythic quest plot to represent Jane's journey towards selfhood, certain texts in this 18<sup>th</sup> century didactic tradition also take on the form of bildungsroman, adapting Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* as a means of representing young women's (or girl's) spiritual and/or cognitive development as an educational journey.

More specifically, however, *Jane Eyre* reflects the work of one writer in this tradition—that of Mary Wollstonecraft. While Fielding and others in this didactic tradition focus on teaching children to restrain passion or acquire virtue so that they might be 'better behaved,' Wollstonecraft also explicitly elaborates the ways in which poor or insufficient education manifests itself in the character and lives of women. Wollstonecraft emphasizes

the importance of women taking on the role of pedagogue and generates a distinctly feminine didactic discourse that subverts masculine conceptions of 'proper' accomplishment-based female education in favor of reason and virtue. Like Wollstonecraft's didactic texts, *Jane Eyre* undermines patriarchal approaches to women's education (as represented by Lowood's overseer, Mr. Brocklehurst), depicting the important roles women assume as teachers and mentors of young girls in helping them to prepare to experience the world, giving them "courage to go forth into its expanse" (72). There is no evidence in Brontë's Roe Head Journal or in her correspondence to suggest that she had direct contact with Wollstonecraft's writing. However, with what "may have been the most widely read edition" of *Vindication* published six years prior to the release of *Jane Eyre* in 1847 and *Original Stories* still available in 1820, four years before Brontë began attending school (St. Clair 658, 660), it is possible that Brontë came to know Wollstonecraft's work. Given the year she spent at the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge and the nature of the schoolbooks she had available to her (such as a Prayer Book and a monthly magazine featuring religious stories entitled *The Children's Friend*), it is perhaps even more likely that she read Mrs. Sherwood's 1820 adaptation of Fielding's *The Governess*, which went through "six editions by 1840" (Ward 234). Sherwood's version, unlike Fielding's, was overtly religious in nature, as Sherwood, a devout evangelical and "active in local Sunday schools," "'substituted dull, moral tales for Sarah's fairy-

stories and also inserted the gloomiest quotations from the Bible on practically every page'" (Ward 234). Despite Sherwood's evangelical revamping of the text, however, the title, Fielding's representation of woman as pedagogue, and the resemblance of the pupils' educational experience to the spiritual journey in *Pilgrim's Progress* remain intact. Whether Brontë actually read Wollstonecraft or came to know of this didactic tradition through Sherwood's adaptation of *The Governess* or one of the "versions of Fielding's text [that] continued to appear throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (Ward 36), *Jane Eyre* and *Original Stories* adopt similar strategies in their appropriations of Bunyan's journey plot, his everyman characters, and in their profound emphases on the importance of women as teachers and the problems of accomplishment-based female education.

In Chapter XVI of Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories* (1788), a fictional account of two young girls' progress towards the acquisition of reason and virtue, female mentor Mrs. Mason tells her two young pupils the story of Anna Lofty or "The History of the Village School-mistress." Similar to (and possibly and adaptation of) *The Governess's* "Life of Miss Jenny Peace," the story serves to emphasize the importance of women taking on mentor/teacher roles as a means of exercising feminine reason and virtue, as it reflects the situation of Mrs. Mason herself as mentoria to Mary and Caroline. It also reinforces Wollstonecraft's claim in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*



that women should have the opportunity to "attempt to earn their own subsistence" (148).

[Her] amiable parent died when Anna was near eighteen, and left her to the care of her father, whose high spirit she had imbibed...her aunt treated her as if she were a mere dependent on her bounty; and expected her to be an humble companion in every sense of the word. The visitors took the tone from her ladyship, and numberless were the mortifications she had to bear... She had her father's spirit of independence, and determined to shake off the galling yoke which she had long struggled with, and try to earn her own subsistence...She lives indeed alone, and has all day only the society of children; yet she enjoys many true pleasures; dependence on God is her support, and devotion her comfort. Her lively affections are therefore changed into a love of virtue and truth: and these exalted speculations have given an uncommon dignity to her manners; for she seems above the world, and its trifling commotions. (Wollstonecraft 426-428)

This is not only Anna's story, but the story of both Wollstonecraft and Brontë, who, wishing to "earn her own subsistence," accepts the position of "schoolmistress" or governess "to put her in a way of supporting herself, without forfeiting her highly valued independence" (Wollstonecraft 428). It most strikingly resembles the experience of *Jane Eyre*, who,

after the death of her parents, was "brought up" by her aunt as a "parentless infant," and it was her "place to be humble, and to try to make herself agreeable" (Brontë 13, 10), since, "[she] had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage," and was therefore considered "less than a servant" (Brontë 12, 9). Finally sent away to a girls' charity school called Lowood Institution, Jane is able to forget the "reproach of dependence" that had characterized her life with her aunt at Gateshead (Brontë 10). Like the schoolmistress, teaching enables Jane to take on a new set of responsibilities, and therefore to acquire the habits of "duty and order," as she was afforded "the means of an excellent education placed within [her] reach...In time [she] rose to be the first girl of the first class; then...was invested in the office of teacher; which [she] discharged with zeal for two years [...]" (Brontë 71).

Yet, Brontë's version of this late 18<sup>th</sup> century tale of a schoolmistress finding "many true pleasures" in "patiently labor[ing] to improve the children consigned to her management" (Wollstonecraft 429) emphasizes the shift away from female didacticism as a female-centered experience that will allow one to "improve" others and be "above the world, and its trifling commotions" (429). Instead, Brontë demonstrates how education might allow the heroine to find "true pleasures" in experiencing the wide world; while Wollstonecraft's schoolmistress must remain "alone" or only "in the society of children" to exercise "virtue and truth," Brontë shows how "dependence on God," not as a

replacement for, but *in alliance with* one's "lively affections," might enable a young woman to remain virtuous when confronted with "life amidst its perils." *Jane Eyre's* representation of Providence and virtue as allied with Jane's own will, which I will address below, allows for the fulfillment of Jane's desire to seek "life." Rather than assuaging her "solitary draught" with "ejaculation[s] to Heaven," Jane expresses (and eventually acts upon) her eagerness to know life beyond what she has experienced as a pupil and teacher at Lowood: "My world had for some years been in Lowood: my experience had been of its rules and systems; now I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had courage to go forth into its expanse" (Brontë 72). Education and teaching experience provide Jane with the credentials to seek out "a new servitude" (72), leading to her encounter Mr. Rochester at Thornfield. More importantly, however, it is a 'self-making' experience for Jane, as she meets the women who influence her change from the "resist[ant]" "rebel slave," or the "mad cat" "liable to strange penalties" (Brontë 9) to a woman eager for "a new servitude" and the opportunity to "pleas[]" others—into a woman who can seduce Rochester "with her unseducable independence in a world of self-marketing Célines and Blanches" (Gilbert and Gubar 353).

While *Jane Eyre* departs from *Original Stories'* late 18<sup>th</sup> century representation of female instruction as a necessarily self-abnegating experience, both *Jane Eyre* and *Original Stories*

emphasize the importance of educational regimens that exercise women's reason. In so doing, they attempt to redirect women's education away from accomplishment-based models by incorporating exemplars of poor female education as an integral part of the protagonists' journey. In *Original Stories*, they serve an allegorical function in showing Mrs. Mason's pupils the kind of women they don't want to become. These exemplars of poor female education take on an important role in Jane's bildungsroman, as they force Jane to admit and embrace who she is. In conjunction with these negative representations, like *Original Stories*, *Jane Eyre* incorporates exemplars of feminine rationality and virtue that represent some type of knowledge or attitude that Jane must adopt to succeed in her quest to selfhood. Adrienne Rich, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggest that Jane encounters various women throughout her "pilgrimage" that act as "mothers for Jane" (Gilbert and Gubar 346).<sup>54</sup> Ultimately, these mothers "give the young Jane a sense of her own worth and of ethical choice" (Rich 474) and, according to the Gilbert and Gubar, the ability to "compromise" or to come to terms with the fact that "pure liberty is impossible" (347). As in the woman as pedagogue tradition, however, *Jane Eyre* represents female mentors—not as maternal figures, but as learned female educators or friends—women who have eschewed the failings of the conventional mother, who is

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<sup>54</sup> See Adrienne Rich's "Jane Eyre: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman" in *On Lies, Secretes, and Silence. Selected Prose 1966-1978* (1979) and Gilbert and Gubar's "A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane's Progress" in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979).

often portrayed (either as a result of perpetual absence or outright negligence) as the reason for her daughters' faults.<sup>55</sup> By characterizing all of Jane's female influences as maternal figures, Rich, Gilbert, and Gubar overlook the ways in which these women each represent distinct characteristics that Jane adopts later in her journey.

Yet, these women all serve to impart a specific type of knowledge that Jane requires to be successful in her pilgrimage. For instance, Rich notes the Reeds' servant Bessie as "the first woman to show Jane affection," and credits her with "prevent[ing] Jane from relapsing into mere hysteria or depression" after her "fit" in the Red Room (472). What Rich doesn't acknowledge, however, is what Jane admires about Bessie, beyond her (changeable) affection. Although she also "had a capricious and hasty temper," Jane remarks that Bessie "must...have been a girl of good natural capacity," as she "was smart in all she did," and "had a remarkable knack for narrative" (24), which Jane, who much enjoys reading as a "transient stimulus" (17) from a "life of ceaseless reprimand" (16), "judge[d] from the impressions made on me by her nursery tales" (24). It is also Bessie who (indirectly)

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<sup>55</sup> In "The Polemics of Incomprehension: Mother and Daughter in *Pride and Prejudice*," Jean Ferguson Carr argues that Austen's representation of Mrs. Bennet as the "'foolish mother'" rejected by her daughter speaks to late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century conceptions of the mother figure as "always a failure, incapable of satisfying incommensurable demands" (81). Carr suggests that "mid-nineteenth century advice books" portray the mother/daughter relationship, not "as the province of individuals, but as requiring considerable institutional support and guidance" (82). Reflecting this larger perspective of the mother as "foolish," women writing in the didactic traditions rarely represent themselves as mothers, more commonly taking on the roles of relatives or mentors.

convinces Jane that she "should indeed like to go to school," as Jane considers "her details of certain accomplishments attained by...young ladies:" "She boasted of beautiful paintings of landscapes and flowers by them executed; of songs they could sing and pieces they could play, or purses they could net, of French books they could translate; till my spirit was moved by emulation as I listened" (20). While these accomplishments are not ultimately what Jane finds most useful in her education at Lowood, as a child, Jane is influenced by Bessie's representation of women's education as an "accomplishment" worthy of "emulation," allowing her to make the decision that sends her on her pilgrimage, to make "an entrance into a new life" (20).

Bessie's character takes on the role of Evangelist in *Pilgrims' Progress* as the one who provides Christian with the knowledge of how to begin his journey to the Celestial City. Not only does Bessie encourage Jane to consider school through her descriptions of "young ladies" and their education, but she also exemplifies the type of knowledge Jane will require to help her succeed at Lowood—a "natural capacity" for learning, and the ability to be "smart" in all she does. Jane observes Bessie's approach to her work as she "move[s] hither than thither" (16), making note of how she "had now finished dusting and tidying the room, and having washed her hands, she opened a certain little drawer, full of splendid shreds of silk and satin, and began making a new bonnet for Georgiana's doll" (17). Despite her 'inferior' position as servant, Bessie reveals to Jane the merit

of an "allegiance to duty and order," which Jane ultimately acquires (and exercises) as a student and teacher at Lowood (71). Bessie not only carries out her duties, but finds ways to make them tolerable, as she "sang" in the "meantime," reflecting the "zeal" with which Jane will eventually engage in *her own* duties (71). Occupying a comparable position (both socially and economically) to the one Jane later assumes as a teacher and governess, Bessie models the type of knowledge that comes in handy for such positions—common sense and the ability to approach what would typically be conceived as 'domestic drudgery' in a positive way. Although by no means "above the world, and its trifling commotions," Bessie also exemplifies an important virtue of the village schoolmistress in her willingness to make a living as her "own mistress." Jane later remarks, during a visit from Bessie at Lowood, that she "she saw a woman attired like a well-dressed servant, matronly, yet still very young; very good-looking, with black hair and eyes, and a lively complexion" (76). The reference to Bessie's attractive appearance functions to reinforce the idea that, although socially inferior, her attention to duty and order has been rewarded. She's now married with children, and no longer living at Gateshead with the Reeds, but in "the lodge" with her husband (77). Like the future Jane, Bessie has managed to do quite well for herself acting as "her own mistress." In the "passages of love and adventure" that Bessie relates to Jane as a girl of ten, Bessie foresees "from

the pages of" Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel *Pamela* her own as well as Jane's *Virtue Rewarded* (7).

Bakhtin's theory of novelistic discourse provides a way of understanding how *Jane Eyre's* representations of seemingly didactic figures, themes, and strategies are integrated into a novelistic framework that engages and entertains (rather than merely instructing) readers. For Bakhtin, "the fundamental condition, that which makes a novel a novel, that which is responsible for its stylistic uniqueness, is the *speaking person and his discourse*" ("Novel" 332). What makes novelistic discourse engaging to readers, as its "images" are "born in... [internally persuasive] soil," ("Novel" 348), is a sense that they can complete a dialogue that remains "incomplete and unresolved" making it "half" theirs and "half-someone else's" (Bakhtin 345), that they can question or apply new word(s) into "new contexts that dialogize it" ("Novel" 346). Unlike the explicitly didactic figure of Evangelist, as a an "object of verbal artistic representation" in the novel ("Novel" 332), Bessie assumes her own ideological life; she does not serve merely to transmit the author's didactic message or to represent his "direct, unmediated discourse" ("Dostoevsky" 199), but "observes, as it were, a certain distance and perspective" as a "characteristic, typical, colorful discourse" ("Dostoevsky" 186). Representing Jane's first mother, a woman that Jane "deemed...a treat" to share company with (23), Bessie is a "*speaking person*" who also "*acts*" in accordance with that speech—who represents "a particular way of viewing the



world" ("Novel" 332-334), that of the 19<sup>th</sup> century dutiful servant. While Wollstonecraft's exemplars of reason-based education for women (like Bunyan's allegorical figures) function in terms of the larger didactic purpose of the work and are thus limited to it (i.e., to teach readers how a virtuous woman behaves), Bessie and the other positive female exemplars in *Jane Eyre* embody specific worldviews and thus "strive[] for a social significance" beyond the novelistic context ("Novel" 333). These are worldviews that the heroine *necessarily* and readers *may* "struggle" with, but are not imposed upon to accept by the "ultimate semantic authority" of "the direct speech of the author" ("Dostoevsky" 187). However, because the objectification of a discourse through character (depending on the extent to which there is a "merging of the author's and the other person's voice") "is subject...to the stylistic tasks of the author's context" ("Dostoevsky" 198, 187), the author encourages readers to accept or reject certain worldviews based on the manner in which the narrator and/or other characters (as representations of other worldviews) react to them. Thus, readers might accept Bessie as the exemplification of a smart and dutiful servant because *Jane* admires her. The invitation to do so is a pleasure because it is not extended as the "word of the fathers" ("Novel" 342), but through the perspective of one without privilege, in this case an ill-treated ten year old girl, "poor, obscure, plain, and little" (216), a worldview with which many might (at least in some respect) identify.

During Jane's experience as a student and teacher at Lowood, she encounters two other female figures that play a significant role in providing her with valuable knowledge that prepares her to face "life amidst its perils." For Rich, Miss Temple and Helen Burns constitute "a moral and intellectual force" that "enables Jane to move forward into a wider realm of experience" (474) and for Gilbert and Gubar, they are women Jane "admires" but whose virtues she cannot emulate (344). Gilbert and Gubar describe "angelic Miss Temple...with her marble pallor" as a "shrine of ladylike virtues," and Helen Burns as "Miss Temple's other disciple" who "burn[s] with spiritual passion"—both "equally impossible ideal[s] to Jane" (345). However, Miss Temple and Helen are more than just ideals to Jane—they exemplify various types of spiritual or intellectual postures and attitudes she will have to assume throughout her pilgrimage—endurance, wit, and, most importantly, resistance to masculine authority.

In thinking about *Jane Eyre's* exemplary female educators as appropriations of Bunyan's everyman characters, it is useful to return to their narrative context in *Pilgrim's Progress*. Prudence, Piety, and Charity offer Christian lodging to help him on his journey, but in the larger didactic structure of the text they also represent spiritual attitudes that Christian must assume in order to successfully complete his quest. Similarly, Miss Temple and Helen Burns are not "lost" (Rich's term) to Jane as she moves on to the "center of her pilgrimage;" their positive attributes are assimilated into her character, combining to

create the independent woman that has what it takes to engage the affections of a man of wealth and rank: intelligence, spirituality, and a divine ally.

## **5.2 CHRISTIANITY RECONCEIVED: THE (RE)BIRTH OF FEMINIST INDIVIDUALIST**

Gilbert and Gubar comment on Miss Temple's resemblance to the depictions of ideal womanhood "invented" by "that indefatigable writer of conduct books for Victorian Girls," Mrs. Sarah Ellis: "[S]he dispenses food to the hungry, visits the sick, encourages the worthy, and averts her glance from the unworthy" (344). Having thus described her, Gilbert and Gubar read her as taking on the role of "fairy godmother to Jane" while harboring "repressed" "madness and rage," she becomes "a beautiful set of marble columns designed to balance that bad pillar Mr. Brocklehurst" (345). However, unlike Mrs. Ellis's consummately middle class do-gooder, Miss Temple is an educator, and overwhelmed by the problems and privations that face the pupils at Lowood. She does not possess the luxury of going home from such benevolent outings like the "listless" and "useless" women Ellis recalls to duty in conduct books such as *The Women of*

*England, Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (1839).<sup>56</sup> As a wise, benevolent pedagogue, Miss Temple more closely resembles the qualities of the village schoolmistress represented in the woman as pedagogue tradition; though loving "virtue and truth" and "seem[ing] above the world" and "its trifling commotions," she exhibits an air of independence that gives her the courage to become her own mistress. Like the village schoolmistress who forgoes the ease of fortune to make her own living, Miss Temple is apparently a woman of genteel upbringing, occupying a tenuous position as 'her own mistress' in patriarchal society. Miss Temple doesn't merely "visit" and "encourage" the downtrodden, she suffers with them. Jane describes the two mile walk in the "bitter winter wind" from church to Lowood, during which Miss Temple could be observed "walking lightly and rapidly along our drooping line" "encouraging us, by precept and example, to keep up our spirits, and march forward, as she said, 'like stalwart soldiers'" (51). When Typhus afflicts more than half of the pupils at Lowood, "Miss Temple's whole attention was absorbed by the patients: she lived in the sick-room, never quitting it except to snatch a few hours' rest at night" (65). Miss Temple's

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<sup>56</sup> Although Ellis's emphasis on fulfilling domestic duty ostensibly reflects Wollstonecraft's educational program, they took very different approaches to women's education. While Wollstonecraft consistently remarks on the importance of reason and understanding as an essential part of women's cultivation of virtue, Ellis criticized women's over-indulgence of "mental faculties," which she saw as leading to self-gratification and "listless indifference" to familial obligations. Most importantly, however, the 19<sup>th</sup> century ideology of republican motherhood that Ellis promotes advocated that women maintain their proper roles of wife and mother, a standard that Miss Temple clearly defies.

'stalwart' approach to the hardships and privations of Lowood Institution anticipates Jane's own forbearance of what she first perceives as "the ignorance, the poverty, the coarseness" of the poor girls she teaches in St. John's village school at Morton (306), as well as her arduous journey from Thornfield to Marsh End.

Miss Temple doesn't "repress" her anger, or merely "balance" the "puritanical dicta" of Brocklehurst, she avoids an open display of anger that would undoubtedly result in her dismissal as superintendent, tactfully subverting his oppressive edicts in a more effective way. This is an important lesson for Jane, who has not yet learned to temper her passion, to submit when acting will only cause her trouble, like getting her locked in the Red Room for "fly[ing] at Master John" (9). In response to Mr. Brocklehurst's demands that she "cut off" certain pupils' hair that was too fashionably arranged and that she "tell all the first form to rise up and direct their faces to the wall," Miss Temple "passed her handkerchief over her lips, as if to smooth away the involuntary smile that curled them," and "seemed to remonstrate" (54). While Miss Temple responds "quietly" when Mr. Brocklehurst addresses her, she defies his authority with a disguised smile, signaling that she has no intention of actually carrying out his ridiculous demands. When Brocklehurst accuses Jane of being "a liar!" in front of the entire student body, Miss Temple waits until he departs before asking both Jane and Helen to her room to discuss the matter, promising Jane that she will

be "allowed to speak" in her "own defense" (58-60). Later, she "assembled the whole school" and "pronounced [Jane] completely cleared from every imputation" (63). Thus, Miss Temple models for Jane the fine art of dealing with unrelenting male authority—to *seem* acquiescent or accommodating in his presence while acting otherwise once his judgmental gaze is turned elsewhere. This is a skill that Jane adopts in dealing with Rochester's "fury" at her decision that she "will not" be his; rather than further provoking him by acting out her intentions in his presence, she leaves at dawn "without one sound," and "she opened the door, passed out, and shut it softly" (271-273). Similarly, Jane escapes St. John's inscrutable authority (in the form of a marriage proposal) by "mount[ing] to my chamber" and "lock[ing] myself in" until morning when "I heard the front-door open, and St John pass out;" she departs for Thornfield before his return home (359). More importantly, however, Miss Temple's quiet, yet effective resistance to Mr. Brocklehurst's edicts reveals that it is acceptable to undermine masculine authority if it does not comport with one's sense of what is right, an understanding which ultimately enables Jane to defy that authority when necessary, and also helps her to win Rochester's love. Among other things, Rochester admires Jane's ability to "master me" while at the same time "seem[ing] to submit;" he suggests that "I am influenced—conquered; and the influence is sweeter than I can express" (222). Hence, Miss Temple's ability to subvert masculine authority by means of feigned submission to it easily becomes a

means of captivating masculine desire in a man who is (at least ostensibly) uninterested in *exercising* his authority, who likes to be "conquered" by a woman who "bends but does not break" (222).

The "all-consuming" spiritual figure of Helen Burns, dismissed by Gilbert and Gubar as "submit[ting] to the injustices of this life" and "do[ing] no more than *bear[ing]* her fate" in service of religious dogma, actually functions to sanction Miss Temple's resistance to masculine authority (346). As an exemplary female figure, Helen enacts a *feminine appropriation* of the tyrannical Calvinism of Brocklehurst, as she explicitly suggests (regarding a widely-held belief of Heaven): "No; I cannot believe that: I hold another creed; which *no one ever taught me* and which I seldom mention; but in which I delight, and to which I cling" (*italics mine*) (49). This is not to say that Helen dispenses with conventional doctrine altogether; when Jane asserts that she "must resist those who punish me unjustly," Helen instructs Jane that she must "forget [Mrs. Reed's] severity, together with the passionate emotions it excited:" "Read the New Testament, and observe what Christ says, and how he acts; make his word your rule, and his conduct your example" (48-49). For the first time in *Jane Eyre*, Helen represents the way in which feminine will and God's will might intersect, providing Jane with a spiritual identity to which *she* might "cling" to when faced with adversity. Like Wollstonecraft, Brontë incorporates an omnipotent yet benevolent New Testament version of God to emphasize the

possibility of a direct relationship to God in the absence of male influence, representing God as (in Helen's terms) "my father" and "my friend," as a "universal Parent" on Whose "power" one "might rely implicitly" (69). Helen explicitly posits this feminized version of spirituality in opposition to 'masculine' conceptions, as she explains to Jane "Mr. Brocklehurst is not a god: nor is he even a great and admired man" (58) in response to Jane's grief at his public reproach of her. Helen presents a feminized version of Christianity that redefines the oppressive 'hell and brimstone' doctrine Mr. Brocklehurst represents, and thus a version of female virtue that allows for the fulfillment of feminine will sanctioned by her "universal Parent."

Helen's close relationship to Miss Temple actualizes Wollstonecraft's conception of reason as necessarily tied to (and sometimes synonymous with) a relationship to God based on one's own understanding rather than rote repetition of catechism,<sup>57</sup> exemplified in the village schoolmistress's "dependence on God" as "her support." And the interaction between these two characters results in the "rous[ing]" of Helen's "powers within her" which Jane regards with "wonder:"

They conversed of things I had never heard of: of  
nations and times past; of countries far away: of  
secrets of nature discovered or guessed at: they spoke

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<sup>57</sup>Wollstonecraft elaborates this argument to varying degrees in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, *Original Stories*, and The Preface to *The Female Reader*.



of books: how many they had read! What stores of knowledge they possessed! Then they seemed so familiar with French names and French authors: but my amazement reached its climax when Miss Temple asked Helen if she sometimes snatched a moment to recall the Latin her father had taught her, and taking a book from a shelf, bade her read and construe a page of 'Virgil'; and Helen obeyed, my organ of Veneration expanding at every sounding line. (62)

This marriage of Miss Temple's intellect and "refined propriety" of "language" and Helen's spiritual intensity produces a method of converse that reflects the woman that Jane will become—smart and interesting, with a capacity to traverse subjects generally engaged only by men, such as history and ancient language and literature. Miss Temple might be read as a church where outcasts such as Helen might come to worship, as an affirmation of the "meaning" "movement" and "radiance" of the feminized spirituality with which Helen burns. Jane's recognition of this experience as bordering on the divine, as she "was struck with wonder," "amazement," and "Veneration" parallels representations of Christian rebirth and regeneration through Christ. Here, in the presence of a newly conceived God and her Church, is where *Jane Eyre*—the mad cat and ill-used victim of Gateshead—is reborn as feminist individualist. Advised by Helen to trust God as her "friend" and use Christ's "conduct" as her "example," Jane no longer experiences the passionate rage she so often exhibited at

Gateshead—it has now been tempered by reason, and later she recalls that, by Miss Temple's example, "better regulated feelings had become the inmates of my mind" (71). Having access to a form of Christianity that authorizes the female as subject, Jane might venture into the "wide" world with faith in His Providential guidance and care.

Not only does Jane's "amazement" at Miss Temple and Helen's mode of converse along with her exoneration from Brocklehurst's accusation incite her to a more pronounced interest in academic achievement, but it also sets her on the path to becoming Rochester's "good and intelligent woman" (264)—a paradigm of reason and independence that is the "antipode" of Bertha Mason. Rochester emphasizes with great clarity that he admires Jane's panache for conversation, her "eloquent tongue" that can address subjects ranging from painting to ancient myths to the Bible, or, as he later relates "when addressed you lifted a keen, a daring, and a glowing eye to your interlocutor's face: there was penetration and power in each glance you gave; when plied by close questions, you found ready and round answers" (222, 267). Reflecting the "power" and adeptness with which Helen converses with Miss Temple, Jane's intelligence, combined with her ability to defy masculine expectation, make her the kind of woman that Rochester might regard as "my equal" and "my likeness" (217). Rochester also admires the fact that she is a woman of "character" to whom he can be "ever tender and true"—a woman who is not defined by "flatness, triviality...imbecility, coarseness,

and ill-temper," but has, like Helen Burns, a "soul made of fire" (222).

As discursive representations of two socially significant 19<sup>th</sup> century figures—the undervalued schoolteacher and the pathetic orphan, Miss Temple and Helen Burns function as identifiable characters in novelistic discourse, not as didactic tools. Yet Jane learns from them, and therefore invites readers to as well. Like the inevitable separation of Christian from his saintly guides, Miss Temple's departure from Lowood spurs Jane onward into the next phase of her journey, since "with her was gone every settled feeling, every association that had made Lowood in some degree a home to me" (71). Like Mrs. Mason's pupils in *Original Stories*, Jane must show the women who taught her to exercise feminine virtue that she can "observe [their] precepts" despite the circumstances that await her (Wollstonecraft 450). Armed with the capacity for intelligent conversation and a Providential ally, Jane is ready to face "life amidst its perils."

### 5.3 BLANCHE AND BERTHA AS 'THE BAD GIRLS:' BAD TEMPER AND MADNESS AS (MIS)BEHAVIOR IN *JANE EYRE*

Like *Original Stories*, *Jane Eyre* establishes negative female exemplars meant to represent the system of female education elaborated by writers such as Rousseau and Dr. John Gregory, which recognizes women as having different mental and spiritual faculties than men and therefore different educational regimens. In *Jane Eyre*, these exemplars simultaneously challenge and reinforce the value of what Jane has learned from Miss Temple and Helen Burns. They test her willingness to adhere to feminist principles of reason and spirituality, threatening to keep her from the path of God's will. Providentially for Jane, in the words of Helen Burns, "the sovereign hand that created your frame, and put life into it, has provided you with other resources than your feeble self" (59).

More profoundly than other female didactic writers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Mary Wollstonecraft elaborated the problems inherent in current methods of women's education. Based on the assertion that women, as the weaker sex, should cultivate different virtues than men, Rousseau's regimen was devised essentially to make them "pleasing," exercising neither mental nor moral capacities. For Wollstonecraft, women educated according to this system were puerile, vain, competitive, and incapable of thinking beyond the petty demands of dressing and adorning themselves. Dr. John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774) translated

Rousseau's educational philosophy regarding women into practice, encouraging young women to hide their intellect and devote their time obtaining 'feminine appropriate' accomplishments in the interests of attracting a suitable husband. *Legacy* was frequently reprinted during the romantic period, with a new edition as late as 1839, remaining "available through much of the nineteenth century [and] still advertised c. 1860" (St. Clair 275, 604).

However, having worked as a governess, Brontë need not have read Rousseau or Gregory to know the *effects* of this type of education, which emphasized "cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety" (Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 19). She writes the following to a friend regarding her experience as a governess to the wealthy Sidgwick family:

I soon found that the constant demand on my stock of animal spirits reduced them to the lowest state of exhaustion—at times I felt and I suppose seemed depressed—to my astonishment I was taken to task on the subject by Mrs. Sidgwick with a sternness of manner & a harshness of language scarcely credible...Mrs. Sidgwick is generally considered an agreeable woman...but O Ellen does this compensate for the absence of every fine feeling of every gentle—and delicate sentiment?...I have never had five minutes conversation with her since I came—except while she was scolding me." (Dunn 434)

Brontë's description of Mrs. Sidgwick resonates with Wollstonecraft's various representations of Sophy in *Original Stories*, emphasizing the selfish and even tyrannical nature of women who have been taught only a "smattering of accomplishments" for the purposes of pleasing men. Like *Original Stories*, *Jane Eyre* demonstrates what happens when 'bad girls' grow up, and how their 'naughty' childish attitudes and behaviors translate into self-destructive or even dangerous ones in adulthood. As a child at Gateshead, Jane is consumed by questions surrounding 'good' and 'bad' behavior, as she wonders why the Reed children seem to 'get away with' problematic behaviors such as selfishness, "spoiled temper" and even cruelty to animals while she "strove to fulfil every duty; and...was termed naughty and tiresome, sullen and sneaking, from morning to noon, and from noon to night" (12). The bad behavior of the Reed children manifests itself in their characters in adulthood; the dissolute John Reed gambles away the family fortune and eventually commits suicide, and Eliza and Georgiana represent the extremes of "judgment" and "feeling:" Eliza is "intolerably acrid" and Georgiana is vain and given to bouts of self-indulgent emotion (202). *Jane Eyre* invites readers to see representations of poor female education as 'negative' examples by demonstrating the consequences of those behaviors; like the Reed children, these exemplars hinder Jane's progress by testing her—making her journey more difficult. However, functioning as the alternatives to Jane's capacity for reason and spiritual fortitude, these negative exemplars ultimately allow

her to achieve the feminist individualist dream by making the "poor, obscure, plain, and little" seem ideal.

*Jane Eyre* offers a varied and complex portrait of poor female education that manifests itself in a wide range of characters such as her Aunt Reed (who closely resembles Mrs. Sidgwick), her stepsisters Eliza and Georgiana, her pupil at Gateshead, Adèle, and the "exquisite" Miss Rosamond Oliver who visits her at the village school. However, Jane learns the most from the two women that threaten to keep her from fulfilling God's providential design for her life—marriage to Mr. Rochester. Just as Jane is beginning to believe that Rochester might "approve" her (133), she finds that he has gone on a "journey" to visit Mr. Eshton, where "quite a party" is "assembled," including the "the queen" of beauty Blanche Ingram (134-135). Thus, Jane's first encounter with Blanche Ingram is through the description of Mrs. Fairfax:

Yes, I saw her...Tall, fine bust, sloping shoulders, long, graceful neck; olive complexion, dark and clear; noble features; eyes rather like Mr. Rochester's, large and black, and as brilliant as her jewels. And then she had such a fine head of hair, raven-black, and so becomingly arranged; a crown of thick plaits behind, and in front the longest, the glossiest curls I ever saw. (135)

Not only is Blanche beautiful according to contemporary standards, with features comparable to the "noble" and "graceful"

stature of a "Grecian" goddess, but, as Mrs. Fairfax relates, she is also "admired" "for her accomplishments," which, Jane later learns, consist of conversing on "botany," playing the piano, singing, and speaking French (135, 147). The image of Miss Ingram undermines the possibility of a relationship between Jane and Mr. Rochester, and Jane chastises herself for her naiveté and attempts to recall herself to "common sense" by sketching out their portraits. She relates how she will generate the "impressions I wished to stamp indelibly on my heart:"

Listen, then, *Jane Eyre*, to your sentence: to-morrow, place the glass before you, and draw in chalk your own picture, faithfully; without softening one defect...write under it, 'Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain.' Afterwards, take a piece of smooth ivory—you have one prepared in your drawing-box: take your palette...delineate carefully the loveliest face you can imagine...call it 'Blanche, an accomplished lady of rank.' (137)

Jane's comparison of her "plain" features to the beauty of Blanche Ingram establishes the two women as rivals for Rochester's affection, and also gestures towards *Jane Eyre's* larger commentary on the differences between women educated by exemplary, virtuous women, and those educated to please men. As Jane learns, although seemingly 'perfect' in every way, underneath the ivory surface of the Grecian Goddess lies a selfish and undeniably bad temper. Jane observes that Miss



Ingram's approach to conversation with Mrs. Dent "was decidedly not good natured" (147) and, when Mr. Eshton asks if Jane might take part in the game of charades, Blanche rudely asserts that "she looks too stupid for any game of that sort" (155). Not only is she ill-natured towards other women, but even shows "spiteful antipathy" (158) towards little Adèle, remarking to Rochester that "You should have sent her to school" (150), later calling her a "tiresome monkey" (161) when she incorrectly suggests that Rochester has returned from Millcote. While Rochester is away, Blanche exposes her lack of consideration for others, as well as the limits of her intellectual endeavors, as she "repel[s], by supercilious taciturnity, some efforts of Mrs. Dent and Mrs. Eshton to draw her in to conversation...[and] flung herself in haughty listlessness on a sofa, and prepared to beguile, by the spell of fiction, the tedious hours of [his] absence" (161). She takes an attitude with her mother, who suggests she "cannot possibly" allow the fortune teller in: "Indeed, mamma, but you can—and will...I must have my will" (164). When the footman doesn't usher the fortune teller in quickly enough, she exclaims "Cease that chatter, blockhead! and do my bidding" (164).

In her unrelenting insistence that she have her own way, Blanche resembles Wollstonecraft's Jane Fretful, who was "so accustomed...to see everything give way to her humour, that she imagined the world was only made for her...she was very unhappy, but did not try to conquer her temper" (381). Like Wollstonecraft in *Original Stories*, Brontë demonstrates how Blanche's bad temper

has resulted from poor education, much in the same way that Jane's develops from the fact that she was not "contradicted on any occasion" (381). Blanche's discussion of her educational experience simultaneously reveals the extent of her ill-nature (she knows Jane is in the room, sitting by the window) as well as the behavior from which it developed:

I have just one word to say of the whole tribe [of governesses]; they are a nuisance. Not that I ever suffered much from them; I took care to turn the tables. What tricks Theodore and I used to play on our Miss Wilsons, and Mrs. Greys, and Madame Juoberts!...The best fun was with Madame Joubert. Miss Wilson was a poor and sickly thing, lachrymose and low-spirited: not worth the trouble of vanquishing, in short; and Mrs. Grey was coarse and insensible: no blow took effect on her. But poor Madame Joubert! I see her yet in her raging passions, when we had driven her to extremities—spilt our tea, crumbled our bread and butter, tossed our books up to the ceiling, and played a charivari with the ruler and desk, the fender and fire-irons. (151)

Miss Ingram's pleasurable reflection on the "tricks" she and her brother used to play on their incompetent governesses not only reflects poorly on her character, but also indicates that Miss Ingram did not have the benefit of a Miss Temple to emulate. One governess was "poor and sickly," the other "coarse and

insensible," and, worst of all, Madame Joubert went into "raging passions" when confronted with childish impudence. Her bad behavior unchecked and reinforced by poor example, Miss Ingram has grown into a woman who, although beautiful and refined, is "coarse and insensible," demanding to have her "passions" indulged at her whim, and ultimately one that Rochester finds "not worth the trouble of vanquishing." Although Blanche has acquired little from her governesses, she exemplifies Rousseau's ideal type of education for women, as she has "has only been taught to please," using the art of cunning in order to secure Rochester as a husband (*Vindication* 27). Jane observes Blanche's posture, having "seated herself with proud grace at the piano...She appeared to be on her high-horse to-night; both her words and her air seemed intended to excite not only the admiration, but the amazement of her auditors" (153):

'Oh, I am so sick of the young men of the present day!' exclaimed she, rattling away the instrument. 'Poor puny things not fit to stir a step beyond papa's park gates: nor to even go so far without mamma's permission and guardianship! Creatures so absorbed in care about their pretty faces and their white hands, and their small feet; as if a man had anything to do with beauty! As if loveliness were not the special prerogative of woman—her legitimate appanage and heritage! I grant an ugly woman is a blot on the fair face of creation; but as to the gentlemen, let them be

solicitous to possess only strength and valor: let their motto be—Hunt, shoot, and fight; the rest is not worth a fillip.' (153)

By suggesting that beauty is "the special prerogative of woman" and that men should "possess only strength and valor," Blanche recalls Rousseau's idea that women are "naturally weak" and "must have the skill to incline us to do every thing which her sex will not enable her to do herself" (349-350), such as hunting, shooting, and fighting. In so doing, she emphasizes her femininity and advertises her need for a man to 'protect' her. More importantly, however, she exercises cunning by emasculating men who indulge in their appearance in an attempt to flatter Mr. Rochester, who, as Jane indicates, is "athletic," but not handsome.

Yet, like Wollstonecraft's various representations of Rousseau's Sophy in *Original Stories*, Blanche Ingram is thwarted in her efforts to obtain happiness (in the form of a marriage proposal) through cunning and bad temper. As Jane relates, "Miss Ingram was a mark beneath jealousy: she was too inferior to excite the feeling" (158), since she did not exhibit any of Jane's own qualities of intellect or spirituality. Like a true rival, Jane lists her "defects," suggesting that "her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature...She was not good; she was not original...she did not know the sensations of sympathy and pity; tenderness and truth were not in her...Other eyes besides mine watched these manifestations of character—watched them closely,

keenly, shrewdly" (158). Never taught to develop her reason, Blanche does not have anything "original" to say, but merely "repeat[s] sounding phrases from books" to appear interesting. Unable to restrain her passion, she fails to exercise "goodness" or "sympathy and pity," since she cannot see past her own wants and desires to take another's feelings into consideration. So self-absorbed that she treats a child with "coldness and acrimony," Blanche Ingram exhibits none of the qualities of Miss Temple and Helen Burns; she exercises neither reason nor Christian goodness. Jane's recognition of Blanche's faults functions to reinforce the importance of what she has learned from her female exemplars at Lowood, and Rochester's seeming affirmation of her assessment reveals that educations designed to please men inevitably fail when those men are looking for "a good and intelligent woman" (264): "I felt he had not given her his love, and that her qualifications were ill adapted to win from him that treasure...*she could not charm him*" (159). Despite her "meretricious arts and calculated manoeuvres," Jane suggests that Blanche's "pride and self-complacency repelled further and further what she wished to allure" (159). Rochester's "clear consciousness of his fair one's defects" and his "obvious absence of passion in his sentiments towards her" (158) allows Jane to feel good about *who she is*, as she remarks "when she failed, I saw how she might have succeeded. Arrows that continually glanced off Mr. Rochester's breast...might, I knew, if shot by a surer hand...have called love into his stern eye" (159). Thus, by

failing to win Rochester's love, Blanche functions to reinforce the importance of reason-based education for women, since she cannot "charm" Rochester with all of the accomplishments she has mastered. Blanche's inability to "fascinat[e] Mr. Rochester" also affirms Jane's sense of identity as a woman of faith and intellect, as *she* has the power to "charm" him without the aid of either rank or beauty.

Jane's "scorn" for Rochester's "project of marrying for interest and connexions" to a woman "inferior to you...with whom you have no sympathy" finally incites Jane to verbalize and affirm her own identity: "Do you think because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!—I have as much soul as you,—and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you....it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal, —as we are!" (216). This moment of self-assertion and self-affirmation is followed by Rochester's proposal, which he later attributes to her acknowledgment of her status as his equal, suggesting that "it was you who made me the offer" (224). Having experienced a complete recognition of who she is—a woman whose "spirit" renders her equal even to a man of rank like Mr. Rochester—'bad-tempered' Blanche, she finds, is no longer a candidate for Rochester's affections. Rochester explains that "she...deserted me: the idea of my insolvency cooled, or rather

extinguished, her flame in a moment" (224). Although Jane makes some inquiry into why Rochester took "such pains to make me believe you wished to marry Miss Ingram," and as to whether "Miss Ingram will...suffer from your dishonest coquetry," she quickly disregards the fact that Rochester insensitively used Miss Ingram to rouse her jealousy. Reassured by Rochester's insistence that "there is not another being in the world has the same pure love for me as yourself," Jane seems to accept Blanche's bad behavior as license to overlook how Rochester has treated this bad-tempered woman, failing to consider the import of *his* bad behavior, though—as a woman of sympathy—she appropriately calls it "a burning shame" and "a scandalous disgrace" (224). While Jane could have used Rochester's ill-treatment of Blanche as an opportunity to question his earlier moments of deception, Rochester's suggestion that Blanche's "pride" required "humbling" excuses his "dishonest coquetry." Thus, Blanche's bad behavior serves to camouflage Rochester's complicity in this "feigned courtship," allowing Jane to have what *she* desires—to continue to love him "very much" despite his "eccentric" "principles" (224). Having served her purpose in allowing Jane to affirm her own identity, Blanche is written out of the story; she is dehumanized as "inferior," unlovable—an object of Rochester's "sneer[s]" and (indirectly) Jane's "scorn" (216).

Blanche's inability to 'please' Rochester with her feminine "allure," "manufacture[d] airs," and flattery serves as a useful counter-example to Jane as she engages in courtship with

Rochester. *Jane Eyre* reveals that the cause of poor female education lies in the confused and debauched patriarchal psyche, which, exemplified in Rochester, unconsciously objectifies women as "dolls" to be "dressed," encouraging them to be submissive and pleasing despite his desire for a woman of strong mind and fortitude. No sooner has Jane agreed to marry Rochester than he begins to treat her like a Blanche Ingram, flattering her "beauty," uttering 'sweet nothings' in regards to her "brow," her "fine wrists," and "fairy-like fingers," with which he wishes to adorn with "jewels," "bracelets," and "rings" (220-221). He suggests that "I will attire my Jane in satin and lace, and she shall have roses in her hair; and I will cover the head I love best with a priceless veil" (221). Although Rochester has just professed his admiration for "the soul made of fire, and the character that bends but does not break," dismissing "women who please me only by their faces" and exhibit "flatness, triviality, ...coarseness, and ill-temper," he demonstrates that he only knows how to treat Jane as if *she* were a Blanche Ingram, threatening, in turn, her sense of self.

Jane reminds Rochester that she has no intention of playing the role of his "beauty" or "angel" suggesting that "I will be myself...you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me—for you will not get it, any more than I shall get it of you: which I do not at all anticipate" (221). Knowing what happens to women who attempt to charm Rochester "by their faces" (222), Jane reminds him of the "diamonds" and "cashmeres" he gave a French



"opera-dancer" who seduced him with feigned "ardour" (120), much in the way that Blanche Ingram tried to flatter him by downplaying the importance of masculine beauty. Determined not to become 'that woman,' Jane essays to retain her own identity, asserting that she "will not be your English Céline Varens. I shall continue to act as Adèle's governess; by that I shall earn my board and lodging, and thirty pounds a year besides. I'll furnish my own wardrobe out of that money" (230). Throughout their engagement, Jane avoids "sink[ing] into a bathos of sentiment," opting instead to "thwart" and "afflict" him, as she is aware that "a lamb-like submission and turtle-dove sensibility, while fostering his despotism more, would have pleased his judgment, satisfied his common-sense, and even suited his taste, less (233-234). By refusing to become a Blanche Ingram, Jane simultaneously re-asserts her selfhood as a woman of "character" with a "soul made of fire" and ensures that she will retain Rochester's affections. Had she given in with "lamb-like submission," to please Rochester, she would have transformed into exactly what he despises in women. Recognizing that the patriarchal psyche is incapable of understanding how to exact from women that which will "suit his taste," Jane must adapt herself to this flaw—making sure that she maintains her own identity *despite* Rochester's insistence that she submit to his desires. Thus, Blanche Ingram serves as a valuable exemplar for Jane, alerting her to the dangers of being too eager to please

and submit to Rochester, though, as Jane suggests, she "would rather have pleased than teased him" (234).

The representation of Jane's educational "antipode" as expendable sanctions a feminism that seeks to eradicate—not the root cause of poor female education exemplified in Rochester—but the women who suffer from licentious and self-destructive principles. As she is representative of an unpopular worldview (the 'upper-class snob') and Jane's rival for Rochester's affections, *Jane Eyre* invites readers to dismiss Blanche as quickly as Jane and Rochester dismiss her. *Jane Eyre's* representation of Blanche Ingram as a woman who might be "scorned" and "sneered" at in the interests of Jane's happiness gestures towards the troubling effects of feminist individualism, as it necessitates the sacrifice of other women so that the heroine might have *her* will. Unlike Wollstonecraft's negative exemplars and Austen's "other women," Brontë's 'bad girl' is neither pitied nor given the opportunity to reconcile with those she offends.

The problematic nature of this feminist perspective is more fully realized with the introduction of Rochester's 'mad' wife Bertha, as it is revealed that Providence regards these women as expendable as well, conveniently disposing of Jane's rival so that she and Rochester might experience happiness in marriage (385). Rich, Gilbert and Gubar imagine Bertha as an extension of Jane's character; for Rich, Bertha is Jane's "alter ego" that "her instinct for self-preservation...must save her from becoming"

(475-476), and for Gilbert and Gubar, Bertha functions as Jane's "dark double" who, "manifests" herself in response to Jane's repressed "anger" (360-361). However, like Blanche, Bertha might also be read as Jane's "antipode" (Rich 474-475) and an exemplar of the problems inherent in educating women to please men. Her representation as a "savage," animalistic being (242) resonates with a 19<sup>th</sup> century infatuation the exotic native "other," and Rochester's description of her prior to her supposed turn to madness speaks to suspicions regarding Creole women's mixed racial ancestry and propensity for emotional excess.<sup>58</sup> Culturally and racially defined by 19<sup>th</sup> century imperial ideology as one who is unable to exercise reason, Bertha exemplifies the most extreme effects of poor female education. Rochester emphasizes that it is not "because [Bertha] is mad I hate her" (257), instead explaining how he "repressed the deep antipathy [he] felt" for the fact that "her cast of mind [was] common, low, narrow, and singularly incapable of being led to anything higher...whatever topic I started immediately received from her a turn at once coarse and trite, perverse and imbecile...no servant would bear the continued outbreaks of her violent and unreasonable temper, or the vexations of her absurd, contradictory, and exacting orders"

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<sup>58</sup> In *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Jean Rhys's rewrite of *Jane Eyre*, her representation of Antoinette comments on and critiques the widely-held belief that Creole women were given to uncontrollable emotional outbursts and sexual excessiveness. Although there is much debate in postcolonial criticism regarding Bertha's race (in *WSS* she is a White Creole), Rochester's character in *WSS* reveals the general suspicion surrounding the racial purity of Creoles claiming to be of English or European descent.

(261). The daughter of a wealthy "West India planter," Bertha seems to have experienced the same type of education as Blanche, as "she flattered [Rochester], and lavishly displayed for my pleasure her charms and accomplishments" (260). Described as having once been "a fine woman, in the style of Blanche Ingram" (260), Bertha also recalls Blanche's "poor" mind and lack of originality in conversation as well as her "coarseness" and bad temper, demonstrating an inability to control her passion with reason. Rochester's recognition of her "pigmy intellect" and "giant propensities" as *evolving into* the "excesses [that] developed the germs of insanity" recalls *Original Stories'* representation of the effects of passion unrestrained by reason, consisting of extreme forms of bad behavior, such as incessant wailing and even physical violence. For Wollstonecraft, Fielding, and other "rational moralists" writing for children in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Ward 33), reason was the only way to overcome passion, which could easily "take[] root in the infant mind" (Wollstonecraft, *Original* 359). Fits of passion led to behavior such as the following, exemplified in *Original Stories'* Jane Fretful:

When she was an infant, if she fell down, her nurse made her beat the floor...and when she was angry would kick the chairs and tables, or any senseless piece of furniture...For some time she...really felt something like an affection for ["a pretty little dog"]: but one day it happened to snatch a cake she was going to eat...she

flew into a violent passion, and threw a stool at the poor creature...it received so severe a blow...the poor wretch languished two days, suffering the most excruciating torture. (381)

Fielding's representation of Sukey Jennett shows how such behavior may result in violence against other human beings as well:

I had a little Play-fellow, in a Child of one of my Papa's Servants, who was to be intirely under my Command. This Girl I used to abuse and beat, whenever I was out of Humour; and when I had abused her, if she dared to grumble, or make the least Complaint, I thought it the greatest Impudence in the World; and, instead of mending my Behaviour to her, I grew very angry that she should dare to dispute my Power. (88)

The descriptions of Jane Fretful and Sukey Jennett reveal that effects of poor education could easily be confused with (or recognized as) madness, as these (mis)behaviors resemble Bertha's "curses," her "wolfish cries," and her demonic "gambols" as well as her attempts to inflict bodily harm on both Richard Mason and Rochester (251, 262). Recalling the tyrannical behavior that Wollstonecraft ascribes to women lacking reason in *Vindication*, Bertha resembles an "irrational monster" that in "practicing or fostering vice" ultimately becomes a "capricious tyrant" (45). Rochester's accusation that Bertha was "intemperate and unchaste" also reflects Wollstonecraft's understanding of poor female

education as leading to licentious behavior, since women only taught to please would necessarily try to please other men when "her charms" no longer "have much effect on her husbands heart" (27).

The idea of Bertha as exemplary of poor female education is reinforced by Rochester's stereotypical representation of the racial/cultural "other" as incapable of rational thought; he suggests that, in searching for a woman like Jane, he was looking "for the antipodes of the Creole" in "a good and intelligent woman" (264-265). Like Blanche, Bertha serves to affirm Jane's identity as a woman of reason and spirituality—one who is "a contrast to the fury I left at Thornfield" (264). Thus, Bertha's dehumanization as a madwoman and a "beast" is a necessary prerequisite to the realization of Jane's feminist dream, since it was Bertha's "pigmy intellect" and "excesses" that led Rochester to seek her opposite. Her "mental defects," like Blanche's pride and bad-temper, also serve to overshadow Rochester's complicity in marrying a woman out of lust, that he "never loved" and "never esteemed," inciting Jane to "pity" him and excuse *his* "mental defects," his inability to restrain his passion and act according to reason (261). In the same moment that Jane excuses his faults, however, Rochester—as a self-destructive purveyor of patriarchal power—unwittingly attempts to seduce her into the same sort of relationship that undermined his happiness with Bertha. Like Blanche, Bertha serves as an example to Jane—one that prevents her from submitting to another of

Rochester's desires that threatens to jeopardize her sense of identity as well as his love for her.

By insisting that Jane unlawfully "be Mrs. Rochester—both virtually and nominally" and, in essence, become his "mistress," Rochester asks Jane to become exactly what he despised in Bertha—"intemperate and unchaste" (261). Listening to his tales of mistresses that failed to retain his affections, all of which shared one or more of Bertha's defects—"violen[ce]," "mindless[ness]," "not one whit to my taste" (266), Jane acknowledges to herself: "if I were so far to forget myself and all the teaching that had ever been instilled to me...to become the successor of these poor girls, he would one day regard me with the same feeling which now in his mind desecrated [his former mistress's] memory" (266). The "teaching" to which Jane refers is what she learned from Miss Temple and Helen Burns—to resist masculine demands when they don't comport with the principles of feminine virtue and rationality. Despite Rochester's insistence that she acquiesce to his desires, Jane acknowledges that by doing so, she would become *just like* Bertha. In response to his convincing suggestion that "you have neither relatives nor acquaintances whom you need fear to offend by living with me" (270), Jane asserts:

I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles

received by me when I was sane, and not mad—as I am now...They have a worth—so I have always believed; and if I cannot believe it now, it is because I am insane—quite insane: with my veins running fire, and my heart beating faster than I can count its throbs. Preconceived opinions, foregone determinations, are all I have at this hour to stand by" (271).

Reinforcing the idea of madness as passion unrestrained by reason, Jane suggests that Rochester's emotional harangue has taken its toll on her ability to exercise her judgment, inciting in her the same "mental defects" that plague his debauched wife (262). Aware that by submitting to him, she risks defying "the law given by God" and therefore her identity, Jane insists that she will adhere to her "principles" and "foregone determinations" adamantly stating "there I plant my foot" (271). Once again, in an effort to gratify his desire, Rochester blindly and self-destructively attempts to transform the woman he loves into one he will ultimately despise. Knowing that giving in to unrestrained passion will make her "insane" like the madwoman in the third story—through Bertha's example—Jane avoids her fate.

Like Blanche, Bertha is conveniently 'written out' of the story once the other achievements of Jane's pilgrimage have come to fruition (i.e., her discovery of her cousins at Moor House, her acquisition of an inheritance). Jane's moment of concern for Bertha (her reference to her as "that unfortunate lady" who "cannot help being mad") quickly subsides as Rochester's story of



Bertha's "pigmy intellect" and "giant propensities" unfolds. Acting as Jane's spiritual ally and "friend," Providence seems to reinforce the easy dismissal of "that unfortunate lady." An "entreat[y]" to "Heaven" prompts Jane's supernatural experience in which she hears Rochester calling her, signaling Bertha's death and Rochester's freedom to marry (357-358), the same night in which she overcomes St. John's authority, "penetrat[ing] very near a Mighty Spirit" (358). *Jane Eyre's* discursive representation of Bertha allows for and anticipates her sacrifice, as, like most 19<sup>th</sup> century representations of the native "other," she is completely denied speech (she "snatches" and "growls") and therefore a worldview with which readers might identify or sympathize. With one inferior woman scorned and the other dead, *Jane Eyre* can complete her pilgrimage, becoming the wife of Mr. Rochester—bereft of a hand, his sight, and, thanks to Bertha's uncontrollable, incendiary passions—his bad behavior.

## 5.4 THE OTHER WOMAN AS SACRIFICE: IS FEMINISM “A GOOD THING FOR WOMEN?”

In “The Madwoman and her Languages,” Nina Baym writes

The creature [Bertha Mason] is wholly hateful, and no wonder: She has *stolen Jane’s man*. Jane’s rage against Rochester, one might say, is deflected to what a feminist might well see as an innocent victim. The woman rather than the man becomes her adversary; that woman’s death is necessary for Jane’s liberation and Rochester’s blinding. How then, do Gilbert and Gubar “read” a woman’s death as a good thing for women? It seems to me that they have been so far convinced by Brontë’s rhetoric as not to see Bertha as a woman.

Baym’s questioning of Gilbert and Gubar’s overlooking of Bertha’s death signals a problem in *Jane Eyre’s* construction of feminist ideology as well as the feminist ideology we adhere to today. Rather than using the examples of Blanche and Bertha to call Rochester’s manipulation of women into question, Jane allows them to suffer and absorb the effects of his confused patriarchal psyche, avoiding those effects herself in an effort to maintain his affection. Instead of acknowledging men like Rochester as perpetuating the type of education that devalues and degrades women, Jane rebukes the women themselves as products of that education, seeing them as objects of licentiousness and mindlessness that seduce and lead Rochester astray.

Reading Jane's only encounter with Bertha Mason—the night she enters her room and “her lurid visage flamed over mine”—there is a brief moment in which the text seems to allow for another possibility for Jane's future. Jane relates the story of that frightful “vision:” “...presently she took my veil from its place; she held it up, gazed at it long, and then she threw it over her own head, and turned to the mirror...it removed my veil from its gaunt head, rent it into two parts, and flinging both on the floor, trampled on them” (242). On the other two occasions that Bertha escapes from the attic, she lashes out violently at Rochester and Richard Mason, but she “retreated” from Jane's room without harming her. Perhaps Bertha hopes to warn Jane to avoid marriage to Rochester, signaled by her tearing of the veil, and then “glar[ing] upon me.” Had *Jane Eyre* presented Bertha's perspective at this point, allowed her to speak, perhaps Jane would have discovered truths about Rochester that could not be overshadowed by the (mis)behaviors of even the most ill-tempered woman. This is not how the story ends in *Jane Eyre*, of course, and as a “pattern for countless others” (Gilbert and Gubar 338), *Jane Eyre* marks the break away from late 18<sup>th</sup> century feminism as a female-centered ideology and posits woman as individualist—in alliance with “her man”—in opposition to all other women. And, as critics, we are tempted to accept this inscription of the ‘bad girl,’ allowing this form of feminist individualist “rhetoric” to obscure the possibility of seeing ‘that woman’ as ourselves before we learned—through their example—that it is more conducive

to our happiness to act otherwise. Until we are able to understand women's poor education as a product of patriarchal oppression rather than an opportunity for rivalry, we will continue to read the 'bad girl's' death as "a good thing for women."

While teaching a course that paired postcolonial and canonical British texts, I asked my students if we might still read *Jane Eyre* as a feminist text despite its representation of Bertha as a 'disposable' female figure. At this point, we had read Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a rewrite of *Jane Eyre* that describes Bertha's life prior to her inscription into the "cardboard house" of *Jane Eyre* (107), calling Rochester's representation of her history and her supposed 'madness' into question. *Jane Eyre's* feminist individualist rhetoric is so convincing, however, that most students responded in the affirmative, suggesting that Bertha, recognized as 'mad' and locked away, could serve no other purpose than to allow Jane to achieve her feminist goals. I was struck by this response, as it signaled the extent to which feminism as an individualist enterprise has come to be understood as an acceptable way to achieve success as a woman in our society. In conducting research for my course, I found that most of the essays in MLA's *Approaches to Teaching Brontë's Jane Eyre* reinforce the representation of *Jane Eyre* as a "feminist" text. By teaching the text in this way, we perpetuate *Jane Eyre's* representation of

feminism as a self-serving worldview, thus sanctioning the dehumanization of other women in the interests of feminist goals.

We might, however, challenge *Jane Eyre's* representation of feminism by teaching the text alongside the work of Wollstonecraft and Austen, demonstrating how these writers have interpreted and appropriated earlier texts and traditions differently, and how their representations of female-centered pedagogies simultaneously reflect and call *Jane Eyre's* feminist approach into question. By reading feminism as a process of appropriation of earlier texts rather than a set of "attitudes" about women, we can address the limitations and possibilities allowed by different versions of feminism while simultaneously reminding students that these versions are always--to greater and lesser degrees--grounded in the masculine discourses from which they are derived. In this way, feminism might be recognized as a *practice* rather than a way of characterizing oneself--a practice that requires a consistent effort on the part of women to carefully revise and appropriate authoritative masculine discourses as a means of rethinking and reestablishing the *Rights of Woman* in today's society.

The need for such a practice became apparent to me the first time I taught Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in a freshman composition course with a women's studies focus. To offer historical context and to encourage students to see Wollstonecraft's text as a response to the perspectives of other 18<sup>th</sup> century authorities on the subject of

women's education, I had students first read excerpts from Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*. Anticipating that the very smart group of young women who had taken my course would be eager to challenge Gregory's claims that women's education should consist of learning how to please a man in the interests of catching a husband, I was surprised to find that reactions to the text were overwhelmingly favorable. Students described him as "caring," "concerned," and, generally speaking, simply "wanting the best for his daughters." Reflecting on where I had faltered in my expectations, I realized that the didactic strategies *Legacy* deploys are very similar to the approach of modern-day magazines and self-help books in which misogynist ideology is often camouflaged as caring or well-meaning advice on women's issues ranging from appearance to relationships to home decorating.

This experience led me to consider the possibilities Wollstonecraft's approach might open up for the women's studies classroom. Wollstonecraft appropriates Gregory's advice into the context of her argument for *The Rights of Woman*, describing it as a "system of slavery" and providing examples of what happens to women who fail to cultivate their understanding in the interests of pleasing men. How might Wollstonecraft's work be introduced as a way of exemplifying to students how they might appropriate and revise masculine authoritative discourses they encounter in their everyday lives? Might Wollstonecraft's treatment of Gregory model how to identify masculine authoritative discourse—even that which

seems "well meaning?" Could Wollstonecraft's feminist approach open up different ways of talking about modern or postmodern women writers that may seem alienating or pose particular difficulties for students? While Wollstonecraft's late 18<sup>th</sup> century feminist agenda may not necessarily comport with postmodern standards of womanhood in its emphasis on women as necessarily taking on the role of wives and mothers, her feminist approach offers a way of understanding feminism—not as an attitude or position—but as a constant struggle to revise existing discourses on the role of women in society and an opportunity to (re)imagine the rights of woman in our own terms. By studying Wollstonecraft's approach, we might encourage students to appropriate and revise current notions of feminism that are all too often understood as abstract postmodern concepts—to recognize feminism as a practice that can become meaningful to them.

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